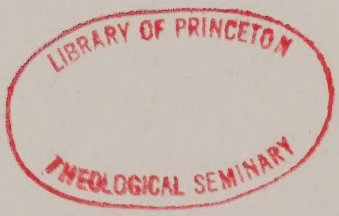

BS1525 .L67
Lewis, Howell Elvet, 1860-
Book of the prophet Jeremiah.

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

Recent Volumes in this Series are

THE REVELATION OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE. 2 vols. By the Rev. W. J. Limmer Sheppard, D.D.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. LUKE. By the Rev. J. M. E. Ross, M.A., Editor of *The British Weekly*.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, Vol. I. By the Rev. Charles Brown, D.D.

In Preparation.

1 and 2 CORINTHIANS. By the Rev. James Reid, M.A.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN. By the Rev. T. W. Gilbert, D.D.

COLOSSIANS AND TITUS. By Canon Dawson Walker, D.D.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, Vol II. By the Rev. Charles Brown, D.D.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW. By the Rev. Bernard C. Jackson, M.A.

1 and 2 SAMUEL. By the Rev. W. H. Rigg, D.D.

LIBRARY OF PRINCETON
MAR 20 1925

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY
Edited by the Rev. C. H. IRWIN, D.D.

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

By the
Rev. H. ELVET LEWIS, M.A.
Author of "By the River Chebar," "The Gates of Life," &c.

LONDON
THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY
4 BOUVERIE ST. and 65 ST PAUL'S CHURCHYARD, E.C.

Printed in Great Britain
BY
WILLIAM CLOWES & SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON AND BECCLES.

PREFACE

THE writer wishes to acknowledge the help which he found in such works on Jeremiah as those of Orelli, Dr. Peake ("The Century Bible"), Dr. Skinner ("Religion and Theology"), Dr. Bennett ("Expositor's Bible"), and Sir George Adam Smith. No attempt has been made to deal with critical questions; but the writer has time and again felt that due allowance was not made for the genius and temperament of Jeremiah—poetic and prophetic—in endeavouring to decide what he might have said on different occasions and in different moods. One would have to be endowed with his gifts in order to judge rightly what he would say, and how he would say it; and how the mood, varying from pity in tears to anger in flame, would express itself in diverse keys.

One thing seems to have become growingly clear—that this book is made up of biographical fragments, public addresses, and metrical songs. The latter, recited and memorised, would lend themselves for wide circulation. If one could imagine a volume of selections from Dante—from his *Vita Nuova* (which contains prose and verse), his *De Monarchia*, his *Convivio*, and his *Divina Commedia*—one would apprehend more clearly how the book of Jeremiah is made up. At any rate, to treat his songs as really songs is helpful to their interpretation; though, in the last result, the spiritual contents, and not the artistic form, are our richest heritage.

"I AM WITH THEE, TO DELIVER THEE."

(I. 8)

O Lord of truth, teach Thou young hearts to hear
Thy morning call;
Show them their task, nor suffer them through fear
From Thee to fall.

Arm them with courage for Thy truth to stand
On lonely heights;
When doubts assail, uphold them with Thy hand,
Father of lights!

Staunch for the right, may they, in Christ made strong,
Brave fire or hail;
May they, though sore the conflict be and long,
In Him prevail!

Of earth's rewards denied, may they press on
Toward the prize,
Till on their soul, with life's last battle won,
God's morn arise!

H. ELVET LEWIS.

CONTENTS

PAGE

I.

JEREMIAH: THE MAN, THE POET, AND THE PROPHET . 15
Jer. i. 1–3.

II.

THE VIGILANT GOD 24
Jer. i. 4–17, 19.

III.

THE TWO EVILS OF ALL TIME 32
Jer. ii. 1–22, 28–37.

IV.

THE ABUSE OF A GRACIOUS THEOLOGY . . . 42
Jer. iii. 1, 4–18, 22, 23.

V.

THE SOUND OF APPROACHING DOOM 50
Jer. iv. 1–15, 18, 19, 22–26, 30.

VI.

NATURE AS KING'S EVIDENCE 58
Jer. v. 1–6, 10–13, 22–31; viii. 4–9.

VII.

"ASK FOR THE OLD PATHS" 67
Jer. vi. 1–20, 22, 23, 26–30.

VIII.

A TRUE PATRIOT IN PERIL 76
Jer. vii. 1–20; xxvi. 8–24.

Contents

PAGE

IX.

"In a Strait betwixt Two" 88
Jer. ix. 1–6, 9–11, 17–21, 23, 24; viii. 15–22.

X.

Against All Manner of Idols 97
Jer. x. 1–8, 10–19, 21, 23, 24.

XI.

"Baffled—to Fight Better" 104
Jer. xi. 1–10, 13, 18–23; xii. 1–8, 13–17.

XII.

Parable and Picture 113
Jer. xiii. 1–27.

XIII.

The Boundaries of Intercession 122
Jer. xiv. 1–22; xv. 1, 5–8.

XIV.

Personal Discipline 133
Jer. xv. 10, 15–21; xvi. 1–16, 19.

XV.

Heart-Searchings 143
Jer. xvii. 1–3, 9–16, 19–27.

XVI.

A Sermon from the Potter's House 153
Jer. xviii. 1–18.

XVII.

In the Valley of the Shadow 160
Jer. xix. 1–11; xx. 1–13.

Contents

PAGE

XVIII.

A Glimpse of Four Kings 172
Jer. xxi. 1–14; xxii. 3–19, 24.

XIX.

Hireling Shepherds 182
Jer. xxiii. 1–8, 11, 12, 16–40.

XX.

After Twenty-three Years 191
Jer. xxv. 1–3, 8–13, 15–19, 26–29, 31–35; xlv. 1–5.

XXI.

False, though seeming True 200
Jer. xxvii. 1–11; xxviii. 10–17; xxix. 1–13, 16, 17, 31, 32.

XXII.

The Stormy Dawn of a New Day 210
Jer. xxx. 7–22; xxxi. 1–9, 15–21, 23–25.

XXIII.

The New Covenant 221
Jer. vii. 21–26; iii. 16, 17; xxxi. 23–26, 29–34.

XXIV.

The Sign of the Purchased Field . . . 231
Jer. xxxii. 1–28, 32, 33, 36–41; xxxiii. 1–11, 14–16, 19–22; xxxiv. 8–20.

XXV.

The Rechabite Witness 243
Jer. xxxv. 1–19.

XXVI.

Burnt—but not Consumed 249
Jer. xxxvi. 1–32.

Contents

PAGE

XXVII.

A Prisoner of God 256
Jer. xxxvii. 5–21; xxxviii. 6–23; xxxix. 6, 7, 15–18.

XXVIII.

Last Appearance 266
Jer. xl. 1–6; xli. 1–8; xlii. 1–16, 20; xliii. 1–10.

XXIX.

How Readest Thou? 275
Jer. xliv. 1–6, 9–13, 15–21, 25–28.

XXX.

The Dawn of Internationalism 284
Jer. xlvi. 1–17, 25–28; xlvii.; xlviii. 1–4, 28–33, 42–47; xlix. 1–11, 16–19.

XXXI.

The Fall of the Golden Cup 294
Jer. l. 1–12, 22–24, 33, 34; li. 7–13, 19–25, 31–33, 37–45, 49, 50, 57, 63, 64.

XXXII.

"All Ye that Pass by" 304
Lam. i. 1–3, 11, 12, 16, 19–22; ii. 1, 15; iv. 1, 2; v. 1, 2, 15–22.

XXXIII.

New Mornings bring New Mercies . . . 315
Lam. iii. 1, 2, 8, 9, 17–33, 39–41, 48–50.

The selections at the beginning of each Chapter are from the A.V., the quotations in the exposition are usually from the R.V.

JEREMIAH

I

JEREMIAH: THE MAN, THE POET, AND THE PROPHET

The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that *were* in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah king of Judah, unto the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month.—JER. I. 1–3.

I

JEREMIAH received his Divine call in the thirteenth year of King Josiah. Five years later the Deuteronomic Code was discovered and published. At first it promised great things in religious reform; but it soon became little more than the instrument of ritualistic extremists. Like St. Francis's First Rule of Poverty, it became debased and abused; and the abuse of it was one of the sorrows of Jeremiah. He had exercised his ministry for eighteen years, when Josiah fell at the battle of Megiddo, and was succeeded by his son Jehoahaz, who sat on the throne for three months only, was deposed and carried captive by Pharaoh Necho,

Jer. i. 1–3.

His Times.

xxii. 10–12.

Jer. i. 1–3. who appointed Jehoiakim to fill the throne as vassal-king. The fourth year of Johoiakim was the Prophet's great year. Nebuchadrezzar, preparing to advance into Syria and South Palestine, was suddenly recalled; but he returned, and at the critical battle of Carchemish broke the power of Egypt, and changed the world's balance of power (xlvi. 2). Jehoiakim, deprived of Egypt's help, was forced to submit to the victor, but after three years of vassalage revolted—contrary to Jeremiah's repeated warnings. He died before the arrival of

xxii. 20–30. Nebuchadrezzar, and was succeeded by Jehoiachin, who endeavoured to continue the revolt, but disastrously failed, and with many of the people was carried captive to Babylon. The victor appointed Zedekiah as vassal-king; and Jeremiah strove to keep the king loyal to his master, in spite of the Egyptian policy of the priests and a great

xxiii.–xxiv. majority of prophets. The Prophet denounced the plots of these Western nations against Babylon's rule, and pronounced their overthrow unless they

xxvii.–xxviii. desisted. But, encouraged by Hophra, Zedekiah revolted, and Jerusalem was besieged by the Chaldeans; but the siege was raised at the rumoured

xxi. 1–10; xxxiv.; xxxvii. 1–10. advance of an Egyptian army of relief. During the first siege Jeremiah gained considerable influence; but as the relief seemed to belie his predictions, he was treated with revived and redoubled contempt. He failed to escape from the city, and narrowly escaped violent death at first, and death by starvation later. When the city was taken, he became prisoner, but was released at the end of a month;

and instead of being deported with the bulk of the population to Babylon, was permitted to join Gedaliah and the remnant at Mizpah. Gedaliah was treacherously murdered, Jeremiah carried off by those implicated in the murder, but rescued by Johanan, who, however, compelled him to accompany the reduced remnant to Egypt. There he made his final and apparently ineffectual protest against idolatry: after that the biographical record is silent. How, where, or when he died, is all in the realm of legend.

Jer. i. 1–3.

xxxix.–xliii.

Such is the historical background. Not Judah alone, but the whole of the Eastern world is more or less conspicuous in it. The vast movement and clash of events and nations made Jeremiah an international prophet: more than once he touches a clear universal note, confined to neither time nor place.

II

The Poet.

He is a poet-prophet, with the sensitive, ardent, variable temperament that such a title implies. He is a man of rich nature, and therefore of contrary moods.

> Dowered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,
> The love of love,

he was, beyond most of the world's poets—and in all his moods passionately ethical.

> He saw through life and death, through good and ill,
> He saw through his own soul.
> The marvel of the everlasting will,
> An open scroll,
> Before him lay.

Jer. i. 1–3.

But the reading and interpretation of that scroll cost him agonies of soul, and he risked several deaths in broadcasting its dread contents.

Austere in style, he compresses his thoughts into brief sentences. He seldom elaborates any picture drawn from nature; a hint, a winged phrase, a quick flame of thought, and it is done. But his phrase-pictures tend to show his intimate converse with nature. More than any of the Hebrew prophets he gives us his own self—unveiling his personality, registering his variable poetic moods, mapping out his difficult course in the midst of intricate conflict and clash of circumstances. One can, with due restraint, read back into the recollections of his early years in the upland village of Anathoth, facing the sunrise and "the falling wilderness of Benjamin." He had known the lion's roar in the thick forest and in the jungle of Jordan. He may well have watched the birds of prey turning upon a bird of strange plumage which had found its way to their habitat; and followed with child's interest the flight of the stork high up in heaven, and the swallow skimming the growing grass. He had seen the heath, precariously subsisting in parched places in the wilderness; also seen the tree by the river, with spreading roots and fresh-leaved branches, with no carking care in the year of drought. He may well have heard a story of unwary light-hearted travellers, suddenly overtaken on some unfamiliar mountain heights by storm or gloomy mist, stumbling as they tried to advance, until they felt obliged to stand still and

ii. 15; iv. 7; xii. 8; xxv. 38; xlix. 19.

xii. 9.

viii. 7.

wait for the clearing sky; but in vain: no moon burst through the heavy clouds, the dusk of twilight deepened into gross darkness, full of peril and fright. To those brought up on rural hillsides, what happier memory, surviving through life and cherished far away, than that of the cool well in the rock? These are but a few selected examples of his use of what were probably impressions of his early years—a poet's best and richest store.

Jer. i. 1–3. xiii. 16. xviii. 14.

His lonely life did not make him morose. Although forbidden to marry, the joy of the bridal feast and the bride's adorning appealed to him, and the presentiment of its ceasing in the land saddened him constantly. He had an intimate sense of home things: the lighted candle and the hum of the mill-stone; the domestic vessel, one moment valued, the next broken and despised; the signs of mourning when death has bereaved the hearth; the gathered figs, separated one by one, the good from the bad; the balm of Gilead, which, after a cut, assisted the new flesh to heal and cover it. He carried country pictures, both bright and dark, in his heart, as he mingled with city crowds, and pursued his arduous unwelcome mission: the ploughing of the fallow ground and the plague of the thorns; the broken straw of the threshing-floor in the swirl of the wind; the gathering and gleaning of grapes, and the shout of vintage; the "rough cankerworm," the locust in its most destructive stage; the heifer eating of the corn which she trod in threshing it; the sheep, neglected by the shepherd, wandering homelessly from mountain to hill; the dove's nest in a cleft of

ii. 31; vii. 34; xvi. 8, 9; xxv. 10; xxxiii. 11. xxv. 10. xxii. 28. xvi. 5–7; ix. 17–20. xxiv. 1–3. viii. 22. iv. 3. xiii. 24. vi. 9; viii. 3; xlix. 9. li. 27. l. 11. xxiii. 1, 2; li. 6.

Jer. i. 1–3.

xlviii. 28; xlix. 16. iii. 3; v. 24; x. 13; li. 16. vi. 7.

the rock, and the eagle's loftier nest in "the height of the hills"; the sweet blessing of the early and latter rain, and especially the showers which the lightning-flashes heralded; the fountain in flood pouring forth its mud-stained stream—one or other of these, or such like, comes readily to his use in his passionate declamations or appeals. Their very brevity testifies to the ardour of his soul, the swift rush of his feelings, the white heat of his thought. He takes no trouble to adorn them; they take their place for their use, and no more. He is an artist, but he is a prophet first, and last.

III

The Prophet.

What accounts for the overcoming strength, the almost tyrannic attractiveness of this man—like Dante? Superficially there is no romantic charm in his life-story or his life-work; it is sombre, aloof, and loses itself dismally at last in apparently utter failure. And yet, once we allow him to find his way into our hearts—again like Dante—he makes a large and secure place there for himself; and his message, in our consciences as in his, becomes "a burning fire, shut up" but refusing to burn dead. It is his moral sincerity, keen (xx. 9) and yet piercingly beautiful, that gives him his almost unique power and compelling authority. He loathed impurity of heart and life, the adulteration of piety, with a loathing that swept him along in its irresistible course; and yet, though in a sense swept along, he guided it—or better, God guided it and him. And

now, that we look back, across two millenniums and a half, we see, outstanding, his moral heroism; if we bow before his outbursts of wrath, not in censure but in great fear, we remember the difference Christ has made, and continue to cherish the fear, lest we fail with less excuse than he. And which of us can lay claim to such a pure glow of indignation against sin? An intense feeling of pity for what is spoilt cannot make good without an equally intense feeling of wrath against what spoils it. In "the wrath of the Lamb" both are balanced and harmonised; but the best of those who follow Him before or after His days on earth, sometimes fail in one or the other—their pity runs too slowly, or their wrath burns too fiercely.

Jer. i. 1–3.

IV

"The angel of martyrdom and the angel of victory," said Mazzini, in 1848, 'are brothers; but the one looks up to heaven, and the other looks down to earth; and it is when from epoch to epoch their glances meet between earth and heaven, that creation is embellished with a new life, and a people arises from the cradle or the tomb, evangelist or prophet." Whether Jeremiah died a martyr's death or not, he suffered martyrdoms oft in life. And frequently the glances of the two angels have met, and his victory affirmed. He has from time to time helped his own people to arise, from Maccabean days, down through the long centuries to our own days. He has spoken with clear voice to the

The Martyr.

Jer. i. 1–3. vii. 11. xxxi. 31–34. Christian Church, to warn her from turning God's House of Prayer into a den of thieves; to exhort her not to lean upon outward rite and show, but upon the indestructible covenant written deep within each penitent, believing heart. The Epistle to the Hebrews is like a magnificent commentary upon his spiritual discovery of the New Covenant.

V

A Great Kinship.

He was so lonely in his life and life-work, that it seems natural and just to select from among other great suffering shepherds of men a worthy band of comrades to surround him in the "choir invisible." Dante and Savonarola, Luther and Pascal, Milton and Carlyle—though each of them be different from him in some ways—all of them suggest a true kinship with him.

But there is another kinship to be named, with becoming reverence and restraint. There are episodes in his life that seem to foreshadow the sufferings and trials of our Lord. One had his Anathoth, the other His Nazareth; one had to endure the cynicism of a Jehoiakim, the other of Herod; both found in the priests of Jerusalem implacable enemies. There were angry hands laid more than once on Jeremiah; in the same Jerusalem angry hands were laid on Jesus and stones lifted to hit Him. Before he was judged, Jeremiah received a blow from Pashur; before He was judged, Jesus was struck "with the palm of a hand" in the presence of the high-priest. But to suggest a

John x. 31, 39.

John xviii. 22.

reverent comparison, is also to perceive the difference. Jer. i. 1–3.
In the experience of Jesus His holy indignation does not degenerate into a cursing of His enemies, He does not stumble at the prosperity of the wicked, He does not invoke a curse on His birth. He became one of us, He dwelt in our midst; but His soul ever breathed the air of the pure eternal hills. It is enough reward for the sad, brave citizen of Anathoth, that some of the better-minded contemporaries of Jesus said that He was Jeremias (Matt. xvi. 14).

II

THE VIGILANT GOD

Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, *and* I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I *am* a child. But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I *am* a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I *am* with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD. Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant. Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Jeremiah, what seest thou? And I said, I see a rod of an almond tree. Then said the LORD unto me, Thou hast well seen: for I will hasten my word to perform it. And the word of the LORD came unto me the second time, saying, What seest thou? And I said, I see a seething pot; and the face thereof *is* toward the north. Then the LORD said unto me, Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land. For, lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith the LORD; and they shall come, and they shall set every one his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah. And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands. Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. . . . And they shall

The Vigilant God

fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I *am* with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee.—JER. I. 4–17, 19.

IT is fitting that this book of compassionate sorrowing should open with a wintry scene. Anathoth was placed among the hardnesses of nature—bare, crumbling hills, fields of obstinate soil, and ever open to the scorching desert-winds. And now it was winter—wintry, too, the spiritual condition of the people. And the mind of the young villager is sorely troubled. To add to his deepening sense of winter, there were rumours, growingly insistent, of trouble from the north, of a terrible invader—"terrible and dreadful . . . more fierce than the evening wolves." Jeremiah had learnt his people's history, their wonderful deliverances, their shameful backslidings, their repeated chastisements. And, as in other days, still they went astray and sinned. For half a century Manasseh had led them in an orgy of idolatrous excesses: the brief reform of Josiah was to end in a return to darker ways. It was winter.

Jer. i. 4–17, 19.

Hab. i. 7, 8.

Jeremiah, though still young, felt it all—felt it with the poet's sensitiveness of anguish: he also felt his helplessness, as though there could be no hope of deliverance. But God had him in hand, as He has every soul that is quick to feel the wrongness of the world, and the need of infinite grace to save it. God spoke to him, worked the conviction within him that he was God's chosen instrument; as others in other ages and other lands, called to great and difficult tasks, have also been stirred and moved by the same conviction. Paul, like Jeremiah

Jer. i. 4–17, 19. Gal. i. 15, 16.

of the tribe of Benjamin, was sustained by the same secret assurance that God had separated him from before his birth to reveal Christ in him.

But such a conviction has its ebb and flow, especially in a youthful heart, and that a poet's heart. Who was he, so young, to attempt so stupendous a task? But God would not listen to his misgivings. When God chooses a servant, He becomes responsible for his limitations, of age, of intellect, of speech. He knows how to handle the instrument to His purpose. *I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.* The God Who ordains, provides and sustains: *be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord.*

v. 5.

v. 8.

God condescends to man's weakness: He helped the youthful prophet in his timidity of soul by touching his mouth. How, we cannot tell: Isaiah felt the touch of fire, but God can and does vary His methods. It seems to have been some gentler means, as in the legend of St. David, a golden-mouthed dove is pictured playing around his youthful lips. And, as always, with the cleansing came the message—*Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth: see, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, and to destroy and to overthrow; to build, and to plant.* Surely, a "burden" of the Lord for such young shoulders!—as though a part of the weight of eternity leaned on the crumbling strength of time. But in all ages "our sufficiency is of God." The weight of the task is the measure of God's compassion and grace. The wintry scene was not

The Yoke in Youth.

vv. 9, 10.

everlasting winter. God helped him to read a lesson of hope in the pinched, grey landscape. A solitary almond-tree was already budding; it was "awake" (as its Hebrew name suggests), while all around still remained in wintry sleep. And who but the watchful Creator looks after the waking trees of spring? It was in his eighteenth year that God came in a like way to Brother Lawrence: "In the winter, seeing a tree stripped of its leaves, and considering that within a little time the leaves would be renewed, and after that the flowers and fruit appear, he received a high view of the Providence and Power of God, which was never effaced from his soul." Such a "high view" is needed when high work has to be attempted.

Jer. i. 4–17, 19.

God used the bright little parable to declare— *I watch over My word to perform it.* Over His word He keeps eternal vigil. Whether we think of the Holy Scriptures, or of His Word of Life—He keeps the watch over them always, everywhere. He never detaches Himself from His promises or His judgements: His living Will is ever present and active in them. God's decrees are His energy in action. Where destructive forces are at work, God is present to limit their attack; where human rebuilding is going on, He is the ever-present Architect. To Jeremiah it confirmed the trust that God had not forgotten, God had not given up caring: *I am awake, I watch.* If God faithfully brings spring-time to snow-clad hills and bare fields, He will not forget the weary heart of man, the desolate soul of nations.

v. 12.

Jer. i. 4–17, 19.

Creator Spirit, work in me
These wonders sweet of Thine:
Divine Renewer, graciously
Renew this heart of mine.

From Bright to Dark.

The gentler parable is a preparation for the more dread vision of the seething cauldron—even as the memory of an early snowdrop may cheer the heart in the foggy tumult of the city, or the remembered heather bring solace in the trenches of the Somme. The evil from the north was certainly coming, it was approaching with the stern footstep of doom!

v. 15. *I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith the Lord.*

How well it describes to-day's world—a *seething cauldron!* There are opposing forces violently at work, wrath and revenge ready at any moment to boil over. As soon as we seem to arrive, in the toilsome journey, where quietness promises more prosperous days, there are threatenings of disturbance, ominous signals of attack or revolt. And many are tempted to ask—Does God see? does He care? And those who have not seen the rod of almond budding beneath the dark wintry skies, lose faith and with it lose courage. God *is* awake, and He watches the slow, sure progress of His word.

v. 17. The prophet, then and now, must gird up his loins, and fearlessly declare God's dictated truth, He must not be dismayed at the people, lest God dismay him before them. Once the fear of speaking

Afraid—Unfit. the truth begins to dominate the teacher's message, it will extend its weakening power over the whole of his spirit and work. A dismayed teacher is no

longer in the service of truth. But let him stand bravely in God's uncompromising might, and God will make him a defenced city, with walls of brass, strong to withstand the assault of people and their rulers. *They shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee.* We know that they did fight against him—the men of his own village, princes and kings, priests and prophets, now openly, and now treacherously: he suffered sorely, and often utterly alone; but all the attacks left the defenced city of his prophet-soul unconquered. His message survives, because his Lord kept His word and "delivered" him, not from suffering or (probably) martyrdom, but from disloyalty, from falling away in the "jungle of Jordan," from stumbling at "the mountains of twilight," from "hastening from being a shepherd after" God.

Jer. i. 4–17, 19. v. 19.

God's ordination-charge, and many personal protestations during his forty years' ministry, make it clear that he was naturally diffident, and shrank from his forbidding task. God had to show Himself stronger than he; otherwise he would have fled to some peaceful retreat to escape from the gloom and storm of his own mission. As we read into the Epistles to Timothy the Apostle's recurring concern lest the shrinking and suave elements in his "dearly beloved son" should unfit him to fight the good fight of faith, so we infer the natural qualities of Jeremiah from the urgency of the Divine charge. And because God was stronger than he and prevailed, we have as product one of the noblest types

xx. 7. ix. 2.

Jer. i. 4–17, 19.

of loyalty to truth in the whole history of our human race. With Paul, in the stress of the conflict, he could say, "By the grace of God I am what I am"; with Paul also at the end of the long and dreary conflict he could meekly say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

An Application

The voice of the Lord still calls in the morning of the day. He has dealings with the young in every age and land. His ways of approach are many and various; the language He uses is more or less private and personal. The snowdrop can take the place of the almond-tree to bear witness to His wakefulness. A sunset, the sound of the sea on a sheltered beach, the white glory of an Alpine peak, the question of a child, a hymn in silence recalled, a funeral—He can enrol these and a thousand other messengers in His service for the awakening of a young soul. He had one way of calling Francis of Assisi, another way of calling Charles Haddon Spurgeon; one text to bear His message to Augustine, another to Bunyan. Every young heart should expect His private advent and listen for His call.

Supplication

O Thou that keepest Israel, Who dost neither slumber nor sleep, call us in an early hour to see the first sign of Thy springtime. Our churches long for Thy word to become audible to many young

hearts, for the vision to fill their eyes with its wonder and its light. The young men and young women of other days have heard and seen, and were not disobedient. Take, Lord Jesus, take for Thyself to-day the flower of youth, in our land and in all lands. Amen.

Jer. i. 4–17, 19.

III

THE TWO EVILS OF ALL TIME

Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land *that was* not sown. Israel *was* holiness unto the LORD, *and* the firstfruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the LORD. Hear ye the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel: Thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain? Neither said they, Where *is* the LORD that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt? And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination. The priests said not, Where *is* the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after *things that* do not profit. Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the LORD, and with your children's children will I plead. For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed *their* gods, which *are* yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for *that which* doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, *and* hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water. *Is* Israel a servant?

is he a home-born *slave?* why is he spoiled ? The young lions roared upon him, *and* yelled, and they made his land waste: his cities are burned without inhabitant. Also the children of Noph and Tahapanes have broken the crown of thy head. Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, when he led thee by the way ? And now what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor ? or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river ? Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that *it is* an evil *thing* and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear *is* not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts. For of old time I have broken thy yoke, *and* burst thy bands; and thou saidst, I will not transgress; when upon every high hill and under every green tree thou wanderest, playing the harlot. Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me ? For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, *yet* thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord GOD. . . . But where *are* thy gods that thou hast made thee ? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble: for *according* to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah. Wherefore will ye plead with me ? ye all have transgressed against me, saith the LORD. In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction: your own sword hath devoured your prophets, like a destroying lion. O generation, see ye the word of the LORD, Have I been a wilderness unto Israel ? a land of darkness ? wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee ? Can a maid forget her ornaments, *or* a bride her attire ? yet my people have forgotten me days without number. Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love ? therefore hast thou also taught the wicked ones thy ways. Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the poor innocents: I have not found it by secret search, but upon all these. Yet thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me. Behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned. Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way ? thou also shalt be ashamed of Egypt, as thou wast ashamed of Assyria. Yea, thou shalt go forth from him, and thine hands upon thine head: for the LORD hath rejected thy confidences, and thou shalt not prosper in them.—JER. II. 1–22, 28–37.

Jer. ii. 1–22, 28–37.

Betrayal of Trust. v. 8.

v. 3.

vv. 4–7.

"Lest we forget."

God cannot count on either priest or prophet to be His advocate, though both were called for that very purpose. *The priests said not, Where is the Lord? and they that handle the law knew Me not: the rulers* [*shepherds*] *also transgressed against Me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit.* These by their very calling should have helped the people to see and recall the hand of God in their history, from those early days when, in the kindness of their youth and the love of their espousals, they had followed Him out of Egypt, and gone after Him in the wilderness; when *Israel was holiness unto the Lord.* To forget the story of Divine guidance and goodness in the past—both for the individual and the nation—is to imperil the continuity of religion. The Christian Church is always most effective, when she has refreshed herself in the air of apostolic days. Galilean memories are our permanent inspiration. So to the Jewish nation were the passage through the Red Sea, the manna and the pillar, and the pattern in the Mount, and the Law. When the prophet neglected to repeat and interpret the story, when the priest no longer helped the people to realise the presence of God, who was to succour them and educate their soul in the faith of their fathers? Who was to remind them of marvellous deliverances in a land of deserts and pits, a land of drought and the shadow of death? Who was to tell the name of the Leader Who had brought them into a plentiful land? They were now acting as if somewhere in their history, they imagined that God had dealt

unfairly with their fathers: would no one come forth as God's advocate to prove God's case and declare the righteousness of all His dealings? No one? *Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the Lord.* There are times when God has to plead His own cause: and He does it. He finds, in such days, it may be a solitary soul attuned to His truth, makes him strong as a defenced city to safeguard the message against the faithless messengers who have betrayed their holy trust. He is a companion, however humble, of Milton's Abdiel:

Jer. ii. 1–22, 28–37. v. 9.

> Servant of God, well done! Well hast thou fought
> The better fight, who single hast maintained
> Against revolted multitudes the cause
> Of truth, in word mightier than they in arms,
> And for the testimony of truth hast borne
> Universal reproach, far worse to bear
> Than violence; for this was all thy care—
> To stand approved in sight of God, though worlds
> Judged thee perverse.

What Abdiel was among apostate angels, the true prophet is, for God's use, in dark periods of apostasy: he is the scourge of false prophets, but his agony is sharper than theirs because of the nobleness of his spirit. So Jeremiah found, in the midst of the "revolted multitudes" of Jerusalem.

He, standing alone in God's place, must summon the very heavens to his aid, when there was none else to stand by him: let them from their serene altitudes gaze aghast on the scene!—*My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me the Fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns,*

Heaven Amazed. v. 13.

Jer. ii. 1–22, 28–37.

broken cisterns, that can hold no water. This is the sin of sins—neglect of God. It is the parent of all evil thoughts and misdeeds, of all heresies and immoralities. A man may lead a respectably moral life in men's sight and even in his own sight, until he discovers this deepest and most secret of all sins—the neglect of God. Dr. Alexander Whyte, in his edition of Bishop Andrewes' *Private Devotions*, interweaving his own personal experience with his helpful "interpretation," remarks: "I have never forgotten the impression that one word of his in one of his confessions of sin made on my own imagination and heart the first time it leaped out upon me. 'I have neglected Thee, O God!' Andrewes cried; and I trembled as I heard him cry it. And I have never come upon that awful word from that day to this without a shudder. That I should neglect God! A man who has all his life neglected God—Andrewes had made me see that to be my true description. . . . 'God,' said John Doune in a sermon that Andrewes may very well have heard, 'God is like us in this also, that He takes it worse to be slighted, to be neglected, to be left out, than to be actually injured. Our inconsideration, our not thinking of God in our actions, offends Him more than our sins.'" To keep this view of sin in mind is to have a better understanding of Jeremiah's passionate reproofs and pitiful appeals.

Cracked Cisterns.

To forsake the Fountain of living waters for cisterns that crack, from which the store of water leaks, empty and dry therefore in the days of

drought—this is the story of sinful man everywhere. The cracked cisterns picture well all vain ambitions, transient pleasures, unrighteous gold, uncertain fame, dry unprofitable learning, crafty policies of state, empty religious forms. Jer. ii. 1–22, 28–37.

1. Judah's diplomatic policy was a forsaking of God. Now it proposed an alliance with Egypt—*to drink the waters of Shihor* (the Nile); in the next panic it would change and seek alliance with Assyria—*to drink the waters of the River* (Euphrates). Politics without God—broken cisterns! Gadding About. v. 18.

2. What would Judah find in her multitude of adopted heathen gods? She had certainly broken loose from Jehovah's rule, wilfully broken His yoke, saying, *I will not serve!* Her unclean idolatries upon every high hill and under every green tree stained her very soul. Does she make light of her evil-doing? let her beware, for sin terribly clings: *though thou wash thee with lye, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me, saith the Lord.* Lady Macbeth, guilty of murder, may in her sleep-walking wash and wash her hands, and continue at it a quarter of an hour, and at the end moan—"Yet here's a spot." And though she try again, it will be the same—"What, will these hands ne'er be clean?" And the last sigh sounds through all time—"All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!" It echoes God's "yet"—*yet thine iniquity is marked before Me.* And the direst punishment is in the sin itself: *Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee*—the cracked v. 20. The Spot of Guilt. v. 22. v. 19.

Jer. ii. 1–22, 28–37.

cisterns mock their hewers in the day of doom. *Where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble: for according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah!* Baal failed to come to the rescue of his prophets on Mount Carmel; but in this throng of gods is there none to help?

v. 28.

v. 21.

And yet—the pity of it!—the nation was once a noble vine, of God's own planting, *wholly a right seed.* Now, degenerate vine, producing in its corruption "wildling grapes"—"how couldst thou change?" "how" corresponding to the "from whence then" in our Lord's Parable of the Wheat and Tares: "Didst not Thou sow good seed in Thy field? from whence then hath it tares?" Every time God sows a good seed, or plants a noble vine, He runs such risks; but He has counted the cost.

Matt. xiii. 27.

3. Does Judah not see how she abused God? She wants to expostulate with Him—not with her numerous gods—because of her misfortunes. She had no case against Him. Had He been a wilderness to Israel?—a barren, parched, inhospitable territory? Had He been to them a *land of thick darkness?* the God Who is light, in Whom is no darkness at all? What quarrel had they with Him? why had they forsaken Him? Were their hewn cisterns holding water in the day of their affliction? *Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet My people have forgotten Me days without number.* Neil, in his *Everyday Life in the Holy Land*, explains: "By the synonymous parallelism of

vv. 29–32.

What no Bride Forgets.

Hebrew poetry the 'maid' of the first line here is the 'bride' of the second; for maids before their marriage wear, according to Eastern etiquette, but few and inconspicuous ornaments. The full meaning requires the filling of two ellipses, and is— Jer. ii. 1–22, 28–37.

Can a maid forget her ornaments [worn on her wedding day]?
Or a bride forget her attire?

The ornaments and the sash ("attire") were to the bride her most precious possessions. God also must have and hold the dearest place in our hearts; or else He will have none at all. To give Him a second place is to expel Him. But *this* bride—Israel as a whole—trims her way to seek illicit love, to win the favour of her false gods, at the awful cost of *the blood of the souls of the poor innocents* (cp. vii. 31). And after all she puts on the air of innocence and pretends to be clean: why therefore should God punish her? *surely His anger is turned away from me!* Playing the part of injured innocence increased her sin. She was gadding about, as though she had made it a gay entertainment, to change her ways, to shift her policy in capricious mood between Assyria and Egypt. Her heart was divided between Jehovah and Baalim, and therefore her whole life was divided, incoherent, insecure. To be irresolute is the beginning of the road to be dissolute. For them and for us the prayer of the Psalmist were timely and urgent: "*Unite* my heart to fear Thy name" (Psalm lxxxvi. 11). For us also—when each one knows, from sad and

Incoherent Life. v. 33. v. 34. v. 35.

Jer. ii. 1–22, 28–37. too frequent experience, how hard it is to keep the heart fixed and true to God alone—

> Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
> Prone to leave the God I love.

Sewn up in Pascal's doublet, there was found, after his death, a paper on which were marked, apparently, the definite moments of his final conversion. Among the sentences and texts written, there is the suggestive portion from *v.* 13 of this Chapter II., in Latin:

> I have separated myself from Him.
> *Dereliquerunt Me fontem aquæ vitæ.*
> May I not be for ever separated from Him!

And then a little later he varies his expressions from God to Christ:

> Jesus Christ,
> Jesus Christ!
> I have separated myself from Him; I have fled Him, renounced Him, crucified Him.
> O may I never be separated from Him!

An Application

To-day our unrest is our undoing. Our broken cisterns are our judgement. Because God is not at their life's centre, nations gad about, drinking now of this river, then of that river, but still athirst. To lose the holy fear of God is to shatter the firmness of the soul, and loosen the coherence of life. *It is*

v. 19. *an evil thing and a bitter, that thou hast forsaken the*

The Two Evils of All Time

Lord thy God, and that thy fear is not in thee. Returning and cleaving to Him will change the bitterness into sweetness of living; His fear shall bring us to the pure joy of heavenly places. Merely to cry in the day of trouble, "Arise and save us," is not repentance; and therefore it will not sweeten the bitterness of the soul that dwells in sin. The cracked cisterns must be finally abandoned, and our hearts respond to the Gospel call, before our strivings cease. "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Jer. ii. 1–22, 28–37.

v. 27.

Rev. xxi. 17.

A Supplication

We bless Thee, Holy Father, that, when we have forsaken Thee, we know the Fountain still flows—for ever flows. We may wander by many a river, and seek many a deceitful brook, and still be thirsty and unsatisfied; but when we listen inwardly, intently, we can still hear the music of living waters. We cannot escape from Thy haunting. But we are often very slow to return. The pride of our foolish quests hinders us. Lord of eternal tranquillity, quiet us.

Take from our souls the strain and stress;
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.

IV

THE ABUSE OF A GRACIOUS THEOLOGY

They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD. . . . Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father, thou *art* the guide of my youth? Will he reserve *his anger* for ever? will he keep *it* to the end? Behold, thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou couldest. The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen *that* which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. And I said after she had done all these *things*, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw *it*. And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also. And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD. And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah. Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; *and* I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I *am* merciful, saith the LORD, *and* I will not keep *anger* for ever. Only acknowledge thine inquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for

The Abuse of a Gracious Theology

I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: and I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit *it*; neither shall *that* be done any more. At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart. In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers. . . . Return, ye backsliding children, *and* I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee: for thou *art* the LORD our God. . . . Truly in the LORD our God *is* the salvation of Israel.—JER. III. 1, 4–18, 22, 23.

AGAINST the infidelity of Judah the long-suffering mercy of Jehovah—such is the theme, in various keys, of Chapter III. Judah is the unfaithful wife, Jehovah is the forgiving Husband. *Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers*—wandered foolishly and loathsomely after many gods—*yet return again to Me, saith the Lord.*

Jer. iii. 1, 4–18, 22, 23.

v. 1.

I

The graciousness of God is revealed in His titles and His pleadings. He had taught Israel to call Him, "My Father." During Josiah's revival it would be natural for the title to become familiar. It would also be natural, in the warmth of "the happy hours of those golden days," to recall the goodness of God to the nation through its exceptional history. Was He not the Guide of her youth?

v. 4.

Revival Raptures.

Jer. iii. 1, 4–18, 22, 23.

did He not lead her out of Egypt and with a strong arm and gentle hand guided her in the wilderness and brought her to *a pleasant land, the goodliest heritage of the nations* (R.V. margin) ?

v. 19.

God's Wistfulness.

Not once or twice had Judah fallen away, and her Lord had watched and seen her religious adulteries : but He kept expecting her return : *I said after she had done all these things, She will return unto Me.* So might we picture the father of the Prodigal Son, evening after evening, turning towards the Far Country, and saying, " He will come home " : and had the son known it, it would have helped him to rise and return. But it was not only a Divine soliloquy ; it came in appeal after appeal, calling His prophets early to win her back with tender wooings : *Return . . . I will not look in anger upon you : for I am merciful, saith the Lord, I will not keep anger for ever.* What persuasiveness of grace ! what beseechings of infinite Love !—" as though God were intreating by us " (2 Cor. v. 20). *Only acknowledge thine iniquity*—" only," so little to ask : *return, O backsliding children, saith the Lord ; for I am a Husband unto you.*

v. 7.

v. 12.

v. 13.

Still persuading, entreating, a picture is drawn of Jerusalem forgiven and at peace. *At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord ; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the Lord*—a great missionary ideal to kindle enthusiasm in every pious mind. The old, painful division will be healed : *in those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north*—the

v. 17.

v. 18.

region of the "seething cauldron"—*to the land that I gave for an inheritance unto your fathers.* On what conditions would they be so graciously restored? Only this—*Ye shall call Me, My Father; and shall not turn away from following Me.* He prepares for them their confessions; He prays their prayers in anticipation, as a mother trains her child to ask her the gifts in her hand, which her heart has already given: *Behold, we are come unto Thee; for Thou art the Lord our God. Truly in vain is the help that is looked for from the hills, the tumult on the mountains:* * *truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel.* This is the language of the Everlasting Mercy, gentle and musical, anticipating the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jer. iii. 1, 4–18, 22, 23. v. 19. vv. 22, 23.

II

But has the bride hearkened and returned? Not even in Josiah's favouring days did she return *with her whole heart, but feignedly.* That the reformation had an element of sincerity and touched and stirred numbers of people to purer devotion, is credible; but the majority either held aloof, or saluted it superficially, or were even fiercely opposed to it (xliv. 9, 10, 15–19). Many sang the songs of the revival, without possessing the new heart. They had learnt to repeat "My Father" without giving up being bad children. They had learnt

"Feignedly." v. 10.

* Sir George Adam Smith:

Surely the heights are a fraud,
The hills and their hubbub!

—"the riotous festivals on the high places."

Jer. iii. 1, 4–18, 22, 23.

to recall happy experiences in naming God the Guide of their youth; but this did not prevent them from offending Him "upon every high mountain and under every green tree." They asked light-

v. 5.

heartedly, *Will He retain His anger for ever? will He keep it to the end?* and proceeded to move Him to wrath. In the fresh spring-time of revival, breathing the air of a gracious doctrine of a fatherly, long-suffering God, they sought for conveniences of evil-doing. They used the evangel of grace to continue and abound in sin. They would live on mercy and abuse it. *Behold, thou hast spoken* [*thus*, R.V. margin] *and hast done evil things, and hast had thy way:* thou hast done as much evil as ever thou couldst! Her backslidings followed close on her professions of returning: she had "scattered her ways" to strange gods, quickly forsaking the "old paths."

As we read, do we spend our mind on blaming her? Rather let us read to warn ourselves and each other. A theology that dwells more on the Fatherhood of God than on His Sovereignty—as though His mercy could act independently of His righteousness—may easily be abused. Christ has made the revelation of the Fatherhood clearer, but not less ethical. A hard father may drive his child to evil; but for a child to take advantage of a large-hearted father and use him as a shelter for evil-doing, that is worse. To sin in Nineveh was dangerous, to sin in Chorazin was worse; not only in view of judgement and penalty, but the sin itself penetrated deeper and more darkly into the sinner's

Sin's Abuse of Grace.

nature. "And this is the judgement, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness *rather than the light.*" Sinning in the fuller light wounds the conscience more grievously, hardens the finer feelings more disastrously, weakens the will more fatally. No one sins against the Father in God without sinning against the son in himself. Every time he sins, he kills more of the son in himself. It brings him at last to gloomy despair: *Let us lie down in our shame, and let our confusion cover us.* Jer. iii. 1, 4–18, 22, 23. v. 25.

God said, *I am merciful . . . I will not keep anger for ever.* They took it up as a light refrain, to sing their fears away, when judgement threatened. God's punishment of sin has in it as much mercy as justice. When a secret disease expresses itself in pain, it begins to be merciful. The mute disease is the most dangerous. The punishment of sin is heavy: but there is one thing that would be heavier—sin left unpunished. To suffer us to injure ourselves, without any remorse; to suffer us to ill-treat our conscience without any sense of shame; to let us die the eternal death without any painful fear—that would have been judgment without mercy. v. 12.

But how often are the pure judgements of Heaven abused! The depraved mind sees in them no more than inconvenience for evil-doing. He would have the penalty removed, that he may nurse his sin. To more than one Jesus said, "Sin no more," when He had healed them, lest their fresh health should tempt them to vice, and that they should so pass through the door of His miracle to the highway of death. The heart, being "deceitful above all xvii. 9.

Jer. iii. 1, 4–18, 22, 23.

things" can "deal treacherously" even with the lovingkindness of God. To it, the passing of judgement leaves fair weather for the practice of wickedness, till it lessens and finally loses the power to *receive* mercy. It is not God's grace that fails, but man's faculty of accepting it.

Jeremiah's warning, interpreted in the Gospel's light, comes to us to-day with deepening emphasis: "Behold, thou hast spoken *thus*, and hast done evil things"—praised the Love, and pursued evil; sang of redeeming Grace, and went on sinning. His warning words, do they not disturb our ease, and overturn our refuges of lies? Wherever an evil conscience may find shelter and excuse, it is not in the loftiest, noblest conceptions of God and His love. The gates of pearl, opened day and night, are a better defence of the Holy City of God than the flaming sword, that turned every way, was to the garden of Eden.

Bunyan, in *Grace Abounding*, tells of "some supports" which Jer. iii. gave him in temptations to despair; especially the consideration of verse 5— "that though we have spoken and done as evil things as we could, yet we should cry unto God, *My father, Thou art the Guide of my youth*, and shall return unto Him." This is an indirect application of the words and their context—and a proof of the abundant yield of God's Word.

v. 5.

An Application

v. 16.

It was a startling thing for Jeremiah to say that even the ark of the covenant could be dispensed

with and not missed. It is well that we should at times be led past the usual channels of blessing, past cherished modes of religious expression, till we reach the clear fountain of life in God Himself. The reality of a revival is attested not by its emotional raptures but by its spiritual replenishments. If it is merely or chiefly emotional, it will be like the morning dew on barren stony ground, sparkling a great deal, but soon vanishing, and leaving no freshness; because while there was much extent to receive the blessing, there was no eager desirous life to assimilate it (cp. Heb. vi. 7, 8).

Jer. iii. 1, 4–18, 22, 23.

A Supplication

Our Father—deliver us from being bad children. Guide of our youth—save us from wasting our heritage. Thou, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy—make us, above all else, *afraid* of Thy mercy. Save us from fine feelings and fine words which only end in slothfulness of spirit. Give us Thyself—all in all. We have found in Thee a God too good to do without Thee—without Thine own Self. Thou hast done too much in our behalf for us not to do one thing for ourselves—to have mercy on our own souls. Amen.

V

THE SOUND OF APPROACHING DOOM

If thou wilt return, O Israel, unto me, and if thou wilt put away thine abominations out of my sight, then shalt thou not remove. And thou shalt swear, The LORD liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; and the nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory. For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench *it*, because of the evil of your doings. Declare ye in Judah, and publish in Jerusalem; and say, Blow ye the trumpet in the land: cry, gather together, and say, Assemble yourselves, and let us go into the defenced cities. Set up the standard toward Zion: retire, stay not: for I will bring evil from the north, and a great destruction. The lion is come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way; he is gone forth from his place to make thy land desolate; *and* thy cities shall be laid waste, without an inhabitant. For this gird you with sackcloth, lament and howl: for the fierce anger of the LORD is not turned back from us. And it shall come to pass at that day, saith the LORD, *that* the heart of the king shall perish, and the heart of the princes; and the priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder. Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! urely thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace; whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul. At that time shall it be said to this people and to Jerusalem, A dry wind of the high places in the wilderness

toward the daughter of my people, not to fan, nor to cleanse, *Even* a full wind from those *places* shall come unto me: now also will I give sentence against them. Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots *shall be* as a whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe unto us! for we are spoiled. O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee? For a voice declareth from Dan, and publisheth affliction from mount Ephraim. . . . Thy way and thy doings have procured these *things* unto thee; this *is* thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart. My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. . . . For my people *is* foolish, they have not known me; they *are* sottish children, and they have none understanding: they *are* wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge. I beheld the earth, and, lo, *it was* without form, and void; and the heavens, and they *had* no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and, lo, *there was* no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place *was* a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the LORD, *and* by his fierce anger. . . . And *when* thou *art* spoiled, what wilt thou do? Though thou clothest thyself with crimson, though thou deckest thee with ornaments of gold, though thou rentest thy face with painting, in vain shalt thou make thyself fair; *thy* lovers will despise thee, they will seek thy life.—JER. IV. 1–15, 18, 19, 22–26, 30.

Jer. iv. 1–15, 18, 19, 22–26, 30.

The Weariness of Sin.

CHAPTER III. closes on a note of hopelessness in the people's heart. They have sinned against the Lord their God, they and their fathers, from youth to the last day that has dawned: let them lie down in their shame, covered by confusion: has not "the shameful thing" devoured the labour of generations? It is the utter weariness in which the way of the ungodly perishes. Tennyson in his *Palace of Art* has pictured one form of it at its darkest:

Jer. iv. 1–15, 18, 19, 22–26, 30.

She, mouldering with the dull earth's mouldering sod,
  Inwrapt tenfold in slothful shame,
Lay there exiled from eternal God,
  Lost to her place and name;

And death and life she hated equally,
  And nothing saw, for her despair,
But dreadful time, dreadful eternity,
  No comfort anywhere;

Remaining utterly confused with fears,
  And war worse with growing time,
And ever unrelieved by dismal tears,
  And all alone in crime.

But the English poet joins the Hebrew prophet in an evangelic hope; the former expresses it in the form of penitent resolve:

"Make me a cottage in the vale," she said,
  "Where I may mourn and pray."

v. 1. The Hebrew prophet takes up again his patient, wooing refrain: *If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, unto Me shalt thou return.* No return that stops short of coming to God Himself is a true turning. Israel, even in her tomb of shame, had still one Hope, and one only: and that Hope always bears the name of God (xiv. 8; l. 7: cp. Acts xxviii. 20).

vv. 3, 4. God knew—best of all—the difficulties, the travail of moral and spiritual renascence. The soil, having long lain fallow, would not be easy to break up. Thorns also had been suffered to settle themselves in it; and sowing among thorns, above or

below ground, would be sowing for loss and grief (cp. Matt. xii. 7). The thorns would have to be uprooted and burned—out of their own hearts; the fallow ground of their own hardened natures would have to be broken up. Or—to change, with the Prophet, into the symbolic language of their own ceremonial—they would have to circumcise their hearts. This "inward mystic circumcision," wrote William Law, "can only be done by that Word of God, which is sharper than any two-edged sword, and pierces to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit." Taking the two similes together, they would have to suffer the burning and rending of their old self by powerful moral convictions—against which the natural soul everywhere fights to the bitter last, as Saul kicked against the goad (Acts xxvi. 14).

Jer. iv. 1–15, 18, 19, 22–26, 30.

The Cost of Regeneration.

Deut. x. 16; Rom. ii. 29.

The call to repentance is all the more urgent because of a haunting sense of peril. If—as it has been surmised—these lyrics refer to the threat of a Scythian invasion, the cry of alarm, *Assemble yourselves, and let us go into the fenced cities*, more easily explains itself. The Scythians, as their mode of warfare, raided villages and the open country, but had no skill or weapons for besieging a walled city. The Chaldeans, on the other hand, depended on their siege tactics. Against the attack of raiders, flight into the walled city might provide safety. Later, safety would be sought in flight *from* the

"Stay not!"

v. 5.

vi. 1.

Pack off, O Benjamin's sons,
Out of Jerusalem!

Jer. iv. 1–15, 18, 19, 22–26, 30.

city :—as Sir George Adam Smith vividly translates. Indeed, the prophet seems already, in his vision, to combine the two devastating powers. He sees a lion, a destroyer of nations, gliding out of his thicket; neither field nor city will be safe from his

v. 8.

ravages. *For this gird you with sackcloth, lament and howl:* for they that will not weep for their sins in the day of grace shall weep for the punishment of their sins when that day is past. *The fierce anger of the Lord is not turned back from us:* we have done nothing to become reconciled to Him, and therefore the king and his princes, prophets and priests, allies in infidelity, shall be overwhelmed with amazement and "terror on every side."

The Prophet presents to God a pathetic protest:

v. 10.

Then said I, Ah, Lord God! surely Thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace; whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul.

False Preachers.

Later it was made clear to Jeremiah that the prophets who had so spoken in God's name had

xxiii. 21.

never been sent by Him—*I spake not unto them, yet they prophesied.* They had contented themselves with healing the wound of Jerusalem's soul

vi. 14.

"slightly," *saying Peace, peace!* and so they had helped to aggravate the disease. The Prophet is back among his early memories, facing the cruel sirocco from sandy wastes, scorching and devastat-

v. 11.

ing: *A hot wind from the bare heights in the wilderness toward the daughter of My people, not to fan, nor to cleanse*—like the föhn * among the Swiss mountains, dry and hot as from the mouth of a furnace.

* A violent south wind. V. Schiller, *Wilhelm Tell*, I. 1.

The Sound of Approaching Doom

But it is not even *that* wind; something infinitely worse: it is the dust of rushing chariots, coming up as clouds, and the clouds conceal a cruel, merciless army of invaders. *Woe unto us! for we are spoiled.* How often have the streets of Jerusalem rung with the woeful cry of "Too late!"

Jer. iv. 1–15, 18, 19, 22–26, 30.

vv. 12, 13.

The day is far spent, and yet there is room for repentance. From the gathering gloom of the vision that haunts him, the Prophet pitifully cries out—*O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thine evil thoughts lodge within thee?* There is no promising response: Jerusalem prefers to abide in her corruption. Then the invaders shall take their course, rushing forward so swiftly that as soon almost as rumour speaks of them as in the territory of Dan in the north, the next rumour speaks of them as having reached "the hills of Ephraim." What can save Jerusalem while she continues in rebellion against God? She is reaping the fruit of her own wickedness: *it is bitter*—like all the fruit of sin at the last—*it reacheth unto thine heart:* it strikes home mortally.

O Jerusalem, how long?

v. 13.

v. 18.

The vision is so real to the sensitive imagination of the Prophet that he cries out in actual physical pain, as though the walls of his heart were giving way. *Thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.* This man lived his own fearful anticipations, and so suffered several times over. And the people around him laugh away his heart-broken appeals; he has to listen to his God calling them "sottish children"—*wise to do evil*

v. 19.

"In Deaths oft."

Jer. iv. 1–15, 18, 19, 22–26, 30.

only—wisdom prostituted to *that!* In the words of one of his predecessors, they "do evil with both hands earnestly."

Mic. vii. 3. vv. 23–36.

The sublimity of his lyrical outburst seems to rise in proportion to the depth of his anguish. We quote Sir George Adam Smith's metrical version:

I looked to the earth, and lo chaos,
To the heavens, their light was gone.
I looked to the hills and they quivered,
All the heights were a-shuddering.
I looked—and behold not a man!
All the birds of heaven were fled.
I looked to the gardens, lo desert,
All the townships destroyed,
Before the face of the Lord,
The glow of His wrath.

The imaginative fervour of the first lines glides exquisitely into the realism of the last six lines, till we reach verse 29, and watch the panic of a city in flight, and the desperate fugitives seeking refuge in the darkest gloom of thickets or climbing up upon the rocks in search of any hospitable cleft. Her robe of scarlet and her ornaments of gold and the seductive painting of her eyes will not attract her former lovers (whether Egypt or Assyria) to her

v. 30.

aid in her doomsday—*thy lovers despise thee, they seek thy life.* The Prophet is not merely a censor: he himself is here as always afflicted with her

v. 31.

affliction—*I have heard*—he cannot shut out her cry of woe, however just her judgment: *I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, the anguish of her that bringeth forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion, that gaspeth for breath, that*

spreadeth forth her hands, saying, Woe is me now! for my soul fainteth before the murderers. Ah! yes, "before the murderers"—but only because "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself!" No murderer can take the Church's life, while that life is real, while it is the life which is hid with Christ in God. Jer. iv. 1–15, 18, 19, 22–26, 30. Hos. xiii. 9. v. 11.

An Application

A hot wind . . . not to fan, nor to cleanse. There are siroccos in the lives of individuals and nations: dry, barren afflictions, troubles that scorch and waste, without cleansing. For the soul within determines the issue of life's trials. If the soul is hard, impenitent, self-righteous, every wind becomes a hot, dry wind—"a wind off the blaze of the bare desert heights." The conscience, instead of being quickened, is deadened; the heart is hardened; God is misjudged, though the fault is in the sufferer's attitude and temper. v. 11.

A Supplication

O Thou Who art the righteous Judge of all men, unto Whom all Thy servants must render a full account, vouchsafe to those whom Thou hast called to heal men's wounded souls, that they may not prove unfaithful. When they are tempted to heal the wound of the people slightly, let Thy dread awaken their conscience to fearless love of Thy holy truth. Let no wish to please take from them the art to heal. Let no passing favour make them cry "Peace, peace," when men are not reconciled to Thee, O Thou very God of peace.

VI

NATURE AS KING'S EVIDENCE

Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be *any* that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it. And though they say, The LORD liveth; surely they swear falsely. O LORD, *are* not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, *but* they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return. Therefore I said, Surely these *are* poor; they are foolish: for they know not the way of the LORD, *nor* the judgment of their God. I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they have known the way of the LORD, *and* the judgment of their God: but these have altogether broken the yoke, *and* burst the bonds. Wherefore a lion out of the forest shall slay them, *and* a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities: every one that goeth out thence shall be torn in pieces: because their transgressions are many, *and* their backslidings are increased. . . . Go ye up upon her walls, and destroy; but make not a full end: take away her battlements; for they *are* not the LORD'S. For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously against me, saith the LORD. They have belied the LORD, and said, *It is* not he; neither shall evil come upon us; neither shall we see sword nor famine: And the prophets shall become wind, and the word *is* not in them: thus shall it be done unto them. . . . Fear ye not me? saith the LORD: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand *for* the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it: and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it? But this people hath a

revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone. Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the LORD our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest. Your iniquities have turned away these *things*, and your sins have withholden good *things* from you. For among my people are found wicked *men:* they lay wait, as he that setteth snares; they set a trap, they catch men. As a cage is full of birds, so *are* their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich. They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge. Shall I not visit for these *things?* saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love *to have it* so: and what will ye do in the end thereof? . . . Moreover thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD; Shall they fall, and not arise? shall he turn away, and not return? Why *then* is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return. I hearkened and heard, *but* they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle. Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the LORD. How do ye say, We *are* wise, and the law of the LORD *is* with us? Lo, certainly in vain made he *it;* the pen of the scribes *is* in vain. The wise *men* are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the LORD; and what wisdom *is* in them?—JER. v. 1–6, 10–13, 22–31; VIII. 4–9.

ISAIAH had already summoned the ox and the ass (Isa. i. 3) to give evidence for God in His controversy with His people. They, merely following creature appetite, knew their master and the way to his crib: "but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider." Jeremiah in the same way makes

Jer. v. 1–6, 10–13, 22–31; viii. 4–9.

Jer. v. 1–6, 10–13, 22–31; viii. 4–9.

Nature bring her witnesses, to shame man's ingratitude and disobedience.

1. The Testimony of the Sea

vv. 1–3. Wanted—a Man.

The prophet had been in search of "a man," in the streets and broad places of Jerusalem—a real man, just and honourable, loyal to the best in his soul; not a mere part of a crowd, indefinite, colourless—or worse still, of unwholesome colour. These latter can make a show of being religious, they can use pious formulas—*As the Lord liveth;* but they have no honour of soul; *they know not the way of the Lord.* But again, these are the crowds, the common folk (John vii. 49), with perhaps some

vv. 4, 5. excuse for their foolishness. *I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them; for they know the way of the Lord, and the judgment of their God.* Alas for the disillusionment! The great men, teachers of the Law and leaders of the nation, knew best how to break the Law and break the yoke of

iv. 22. God; they were only "wise to do evil." In the same Jerusalem, some six centuries later, the leaders were just as much strangers to God's living truth.

John iii. 10. "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?" The house of Israel and the house

v. 6. of Judah had proved traitors to Jehovah: *their transgressions are many, and their backslidings are increased.* For such a people what is there but ruin,

v. 12. already afoot? Scornfully, laughingly they reply—*Not He!* God will not let famine and sword visit us—not likely! Jerusalem—the Temple—the Ark: they are safe, and so we too in their triple guard are

safe. Prophets indeed! (of Jeremiah's school)— they are mere passing wind; *the word is not in them.* So they laughed and carried on. Jer. v. 1–6, 10–13, 22–31; viii. 4–9.

Before the "full end" comes one more chance, even for a foolish and rebellious people, *which have eyes and see not, which have ears and hear not*—let them come to the shore of the sea! There it moves and heaves, restless and huge and ever-changing, but the sand—tiny, and loose, and innumerable—securely binds it, by a perpetual decree of restraint: *though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it.* Could anything seem less likely to hold within its bounds an angry sea than these minute battalions of sand? but thousands of years leave them still in authority. So also the Lord led Job to the sea-shore to view "the bars and doors" which He had set, saying as He prescribed the sand for its boundary, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." Proud waves, yet submissive: proud man, dost thou not fear to bring here thy revolting, rebellious heart? *Fear ye not Me, saith the Lord? will ye not tremble at My presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea?* vv. 20–23. An Object-lesson in Submission. Job xxxviii. 10, 11.

Of the thousands and hundreds of thousands who either live near the shore, or visit it in summer weeks, how many have heard this message from its incoming waves, or the "boom of its rollers"? Its freshness, its constantly changing music, its blue waves breaking into white, are a great boon and balm to tired body, and tired eyes and ears,

Jer. v. 1–6, 10–13, 22–31 ; viii. 4–9.

and tired mind. But does it all end there ? Does not the spirit feel awed in the presence of the Author of order, the Ruler of too eager forces ? Do we pray, as we watch the ardent waves rushing tumultuously on to the calm stretches of sand, and ever held back, that so should we have our wills subdued to the Holy Spirit's control ?

> Tempests are calm to Thee, they know Thy hand,
> And hold it fast, as children do their father's,
> Which cry and follow. Thou hast made poor sand
> Check the proud sea, e'en when it swells and gathers.

Can a man strive with the Lord of the tempestuous sea ? Shall he not rather learn to bend his will in a season of grace ? and in bending it he shall himself enter the realm of law and order, and eternal moral beauty.

2. The Testimony of Harvest-tide

v. 24.

Cornfields speak for God.

If the lesson of the sea be too remote, too impersonal for a people with so rebellious a heart, here is something nearer. They depended for their daily bread on the seasonable return of the early and latter rain, and the regular advent of harvest. The rule is that they come, year after year ; the exception is when they fail, and the exception is designed for warning and discipline. What right have people whose houses are as full of deceit as a

v. 27.

cage—a crate in the market-place—is full of birds, to refreshing showers on their sown furrows ? what right have those who have waxen rich and

v. 28.

gaudy—*they are waxen fat, and shine !*—what right

to whitening wheatfields? Shall God without fail give well-eared sheaves to profiteering oppressors who thrive and flourish at the expense of the fatherless and the needy? From the sea-shore to the harvest-field, and everywhere the voices of nature utter their mute protest against man's disobedience and unruly will. The sun every morning, at the bidding of the perfect Father in heaven, shines in at the window of the evil-minded, and His rain gently falls on the field of the unjust; but every beam reproves and every rain-drop weeps. The people grasp and devour the gifts and neglect the Giver. They give no heed to His voice, they pay no regard to His truth: *The prophets prophesy falsely . . . and My people love to have it so.* They feed each other in untruth: their lies of heart and lip, of altar and hearth, insult God's golden sheaves! As in Palestine, so it may be in these British Isles.

Jer. v. 1–6, 10–13, 22–31; viii. 4–9.

v. 31.

3. The Testimony of Emigrant Birds

Once again we are called to look on the rebellious human heart, as seen in Jerusalem's "perpetual backsliding." *Every one turneth to his course, as a horse that rusheth headlong in the battle.* Sin, whatever its colour or degree, has in it always something of the madness of battle. "Sin aims always at the utmost," wrote Dr. John Owen: "every time it rises up to tempt or to entice, might it have its own course, it would go out to the utmost sin in that kind: every unclean thought or glance would be adultery, if it could; every covetous desire would be oppression; every thought of unbelief would be

viii. 5.

Jer. v. 1–6, 10–13, 22–31; viii. 4–9.

atheism—might it grow to its head." That is the madness of the battle-steed in its headlong rush, insensible to the mortal peril. *No man repenteth him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?*

The South in a Bird's Breast.

v. 6.

v. 7.

Nor does he ask whither he goes. *Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the swallow and the crane observe the time of their coming; but My people know not the ordinance of the Lord.* The migration of birds is one of the most beautiful and symbolic lessons in Nature. They attend no school; they consult no map; when they assemble for flight, no amendment is proposed, no novel experiment is tried. They have no almanac, and yet they are sure of their dates; they have no map, and yet they know their route. The swallows never turn northwards when they are warned by the autumnal chill in the air. The young birds of spring make the journey south as confidently as their parents which had returned to their former nesting-place. But man often neglects his season and takes the wrong direction. He leaves the greatest matter till it is too late: he flies north to meet the storm, when he should fly south to breathe God's summer. *How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us?*—when the day of your grace is mis-spent, and you gad about ever to change your way? To trust God is to journey homewards.

v. 8.

ii. 36.

There is a Power whose care
Teaches thy way along that pathless coast,—
The desert and illimitable air,—
Lone wandering, but not lost.

* * * * *

And soon that toil shall end,
Soon shalt thou find a summer home, and rest
And scream among thy fellows: reeds shall bend
Soon, o'er thy sheltered nest.
* * * * *
He who, from zone to zone,
Guides thro' the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone
Will lead my steps aright.

Jer. v. 1–6, 10–13, 22–31; viii. 4–9.

An Application

Luther, once returning home from Leipzig, was much struck by the beauty of the harvest-fields: "How it stands, that golden yellow corn, on its fair taper stem, its golden head bent, all rich and waving there—the meek earth, at God's kind bidding, has produced it once again; the bread of man!" We must not allow ourselves, in the hurry and strain of life, to become dull to the appeal of beauty, and order, and harmony in Nature.

Something must have gone wrong with the primal emotions of a man, if he can watch the birds in autumn preparing for their sunward flight, without any feeling of *Heimweh*—without any longing for arriving some day in a land where there is neither winter of sin nor dark night of death nor sundering sea.

A Supplication

O Thou faithful Creator, Who art everywhere seeking us, forgive us our foolishness in turning away from Thee when we know that Thou art near. Every hour is trysting-time between our souls and

Jer. v. 1–6, 10–13, 22–31; viii. 4–9.

Thee, but we are faithless and negligent often; every scene, every nook of land or sea, is our meeting-place with Thee, but our secular hearts are not ready to acknowledge Thy presence. We miss the intimate fellowship of Thy flowers, Thy birds, Thy stars, Thy great sea, because we are ashamed of our own rebellious wills. Then, Lord, work Thou by our very shame unto our salvation. Amen.

VII

"ASK FOR THE OLD PATHS"

O ye children of Benjamin, gather yourselves to flee out of the midst of Jerusalem, and blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and set up a sign of fire in Bethhaccerem: for evil appeareth out of the north, and great destruction. I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate *woman*. The shepherds with their flocks shall come unto her; they shall pitch *their* tents against her round about; they shall feed every one in his place. Prepare ye war against her; arise, and let us go up at noon. Woe unto us! for the day goeth away, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out. Arise, and let us go by night, and let us destroy her palaces. For thus hath the LORD of hosts said, Hew ye down trees, and cast a mount against Jerusalem: this *is* the city to be visited; she *is* wholly oppression in the midst of her. As a fountain casteth out her waters, so she casteth out her wickedness: violence and spoil is heard in her; before me continually *is* grief and wounds. Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall thoroughly glean the remnant of Israel as a vine: turn back thine hand as a grapegatherer into the baskets. To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear *is* uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it. Therefore I am full of the fury of the LORD; I am weary with holding in: I will pour it out upon the children abroad, and upon the assembly of young men together: for even the husband with the wife shall be taken, the aged with *him that is* full of days. And their houses shall be turned unto others, *with their* fields and wives together: for I will stretch out my hand upon the inhabitants of the land, saith the LORD. For from the least of them even unto the

greatest of them every one *is* given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. They have healed also the hurt *of the daughter* of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when *there is* no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time *that* I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD. Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where *is* the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk *therein*. Also I set watchmen over you, *saying*, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken. Therefore hear, ye nations, and know, O congregation, what *is* among them. Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, *even* the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it. To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? your burnt offerings *are* not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto me. . . . Thus saith the LORD, Behold, a people cometh from the north country, and a great nation shall be raised from the sides of the earth. They shall lay hold on bow and spear; they *are* cruel, and have no mercy; their voice roareth like the sea; and they ride upon horses, set in array as men for war against thee, O daughter of Zion. . . . O daughter of my people, gird *thee* with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in ashes: make thee mourning, *as for* an only son, most bitter lamentation: for the spoiler shall suddenly come upon us. I have set thee *for* a tower *and* a fortress among my people, that thou mayest know and try their way. They *are* all grievous revolters, walking with slanders: *they are* brass and iron; they *are* all corrupters. The bellows are burned, the lead is consumed of the fire; the founder melteth in vain: for the wicked are not plucked away. Reprobate silver shall *men* call them, because the LORD hath rejected them.—JER. VI. 1–20, 22, 23, 26–30.

Jer. vi. 1–20, 22, 23, 26–30.

THIS is a Chapter of alarms; it moves from terror to terror. Before the end of it the prophet himself feels exhausted: he has to be re-assured of the validity of his call and ordination: *I have made thee*

a tower and a fortress among My people. Whatever hostility his daring words may have stirred in them anew, he must stand undaunted, though bare to all their attacks. As usual with him, however terrible his declamations may be, in the midst of them there are exquisite phrases and patient appeals.

Jer. vi. 1–20, 22, 23, 26–30.

Sound an Alarm!

v. 27.

He begins by a call to flight—southwards from Jerusalem, inasmuch as the *evil looketh forth from the north,* where the seething cauldron still boils. Many from the surrounding country had fled into Jerusalem for safety (cp. xxxv. 11); but Jerusalem is no longer safe. The besiegers are marching steadily on: soon they will pitch their tents within sight of the walls. They had intended to make the advance in the morning: they had cancelled the plan for some reason, and noon was now past: *Woe unto us! for the day declineth, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out.* Is Jerusalem then safe? can its citizens peacefully sleep? By no means, for there will be a night attack: *Arise and let us go up by night, and let us destroy her palaces.*

v. 1.

v. 4.

v. 5.

Jerusalem gives God no chance of saving her. She not only oppresses the defenceless, *she is wholly oppression*—has made it her business to defraud and oppress. A springing well keeps its waters fresh; so Jerusalem keeps fresh her wickedness. If instead of "well," we read "cistern" (as we may), then it pictures man receiving something that is alien into himself, but yet he cherishes the alien sin and gives it fresh vigour. If sin the alien is cherished, it will alienate God. *Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest My soul be alienated from thee.* Sin would turn God

v. 6.

What if God depart?

v. 8.

Jer. vi. 1–20, 22, 23, 26–30.

out of His own house of the soul, and become a flourishing inmate.

The prophet sees the indifference, the stiff neck and hard heart, and cries out in despair, *To whom shall I speak and testify, that they may hear?* He is a preacher in search of a listening audience, with a circumcised ear; and like many another, before and since, he had great difficulty in finding it.

v. 10. *The word of the Lord is become unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it*—largely true in this country in A.D. 1924, as it was in Jerusalem about 621 B.C. Nothing shows more convincingly the bankruptcy of a nation's soul, than that it should have no taste for the Word of God. To have no delight in good news from heaven is to be sunk deep in earthliness, and to sink deeper still.

v. 11. *Therefore I am full of the fury of the Lord; I am weary with holding in.* Better be stirred with divine indignation than be lulled in soft complacency, when covetousness seemed to be every man's calling, and

v. 14. false dealing the trade of prophet and priest! *They have healed also the hurt of My people lightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.* To heal lightly is to lose the opportunity of healing soundly. To cry Peace! when there is no peace, is to kill peace. A right view of the greatness of salvation

v. 15. saves us from making light of sin. *Were they ashamed when they had committed abominations? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush.* After all, there is in shame a small seed of repentance; but here there was not even a penitential blush!

"Ask for the Old Paths"

To this has the daughter of Zion, *the comely and delicate one*, sunk! Jerusalem, alienating from her soul the love of her Lord, turns to His gracious wooing a dull, unlistening ear. And yet, the Spirit pleads: alas! not the Spirit *and* the Bride (Rev. xxii. 17), but the Spirit pleads *with* the faithless Bride to return. Jer. vi. 1–20, 22, 23, 26–30. v. 2.

The mighty appeal is picturesquely and beautifully expressed: *Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.* The good way is the way home—to God, in Whom all our restlessness comes to an end. No pioneering adventure is needed or profitable: the old paths, tried and found safe, are the only paths. "Come a little way with me," said Goodwill to Christian, "and I will teach thee about the way thou must go. Look before thee; dost thou see this narrow way? *That* is the way thou must go: it was cast up by the Patriarchs, Prophets, Christ and His Apostles; and it is as straight as a rule can make it: This is the way thou must go." If Jeremiah could point out the good way so clearly, how much clearer has Christ made it to us! The Good Way. v. 16.

Our glorious Leader claims our praise
For His own pattern given;
While the long cloud of witnesses
Show the same path to Heaven.

The present appeal was rejected: *they said, We will not walk therein.* Their "gadding about" had made it irksome for them to walk in the old paths Case-hardened.

Jer. vi. 1–20, 22, 23, 26–30. Ezek. xxxiii. 4.

"as straight as a rule can make them." God had purposely set His watchmen over them, to sound the trumpet for alarm; but hearken they would not. "Whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head." Jeremiah's audience in Jerusalem, and Ezekiel's audience in Babylon, were to be tried by the same message; in both cases it failed—for the time: *they said, We will not hearken.* The prophet summons the nations to take knowledge of the national disobedience, so that later they might recognise the justice of the nation's destruction: he calls even the mute earth to witness the sin and

v. 19. the doom: *Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts.* Jeremiah emphasises, with unwearied repetition, the truth that punishment is not something added to sin from without: it is inherent in it; it is "fruit."

Boldly the people's reply seemed to come: Surely we are making costly efforts to please Jehovah! we buy frankincense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country: we are æsthetic in our worship at some expense; we make our ritual more and more elaborate, and study fresh novel-

v. 20. ties with much zeal! Unprofitable devices!—*Your burnt-offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices pleasing unto Me.* Leave your self-imposed experiments in novel ways of religion, *ask for the old paths.*

If they still refused, the ruin of their city and

their land could not be averted; the terror from the North could not be held back. *They are cruel, and have no mercy; their voice roareth like the sea, and they ride upon horses.* Neither street nor field will be safe; *for there is the sword of the enemy, and terror on every side.* There is neither defence nor deliverance: sackcloth will be more seasonable than armour. *O daughter of My people . . . make thee mourning as for an only son, most bitter lamentation!* —as the late war testified anew. So pathos and hard truth mingled in the prophet's unwelcome lyrics.

Jer. vi. 1–20, 22, 23, 26–40. v. 23. v. 26.

And he hurt himself more than he hurt his audiences. They could walk away lightly and laugh, while he felt himself smitten and bruised. Time and again God had to renew in his soul the sense of being God's "tower and fortress" among His revolting people; or, as the margin suggestively reads, a "trier" and a fortress—*that thou mayest know and try their ways.* He is an assayer in their midst: *the bellows blow fiercely,* but alas! no refining takes place; it is dross, all dross! The messenger consumes himself, while his message seems a total failure. John, "a *burning* and a shining light," burnt himself out; while those who were "willing for a season to walk in his light" lived on to reject the Christ Whom he so faithfully proclaimed. *Refuse silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them.* "Many will at last be rejected"—so wrote Azariah Shadrach, a Welsh preacher of a century ago, as quaint often in his style as his name—"in spite of their appearance

v. 27. "Refuse Silver." v. 29. v. 30.

Jer. vi. 1–20, 22, 23, 26–30. —Because (1) they are not of the right sort, they are devoid of the holy nature; (2) they cannot stand the test of God's Word, they lose their brightness in God's furnaces; (3) the image of King Alpha cannot be seen on them; (4) they do not ring true—their prayers, their thanksgiving, their confessions have a sound of pride and lack true experience; (5) they will be found wanting when weighed in the balance of righteousness."

An Application

The experience of Jeremiah has been repeated, sadly often, in the experience of bearers of Divine truth. Francis of Assisi, dying, endured agonies of grief over the decadence of the Order which he had founded. "Shattered as he was by fever, he would suddenly rise up in his bed, crying with a despairing intensity: 'Where are they who have ravished my brethren from me? Where are they who have stolen away my family?'"

When the soul of a great and lonely pioneer so faints within him, he must encourage himself in God. He must not grow tired in stepping with the infantry, when he may have before him the task of running with fate's cavalry. Francis turned from lamenting, and took up once again the sweet and joyous melody of his "Canticle of the Sun," and lost the fear of the jungle of Jordan. Such are all they who from weakness are made strong and wax mighty in war. Heb. xi. 34.

"Ask for the Old Paths"

A Supplication

Jer. vi. 1–20, 22, 23, 26–30.

Lord, who teacheth like Thee? Then make us and ever keep us teachable, lest Thy soul depart from us. We are so slow of heart, and our dullness limits Thy revelation. Thou hast yet many things to say unto us, but we cannot even now, after much instruction, bear them. The unlearnt lesson of yesterday shuts out the new lesson of to-day. Save us at all costs from becoming unteachable, lest we should come at last even to Gethsemane, and climb the heights of Calvary—and learn nothing. Amen.

v. 8.

VIII

A TRUE PATRIOT IN PERIL

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all *ye of* Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, *are* these. For if ye throughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye throughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; *If* ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever. Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; and come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen *it*, saith the LORD. But go ye now unto my place which *was* in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; therefore will I do unto *this* house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, *even* the whole seed of Ephraim. Therefore pray not

thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee. Seest thou not what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead *their* dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger. Do they provoke me to anger? saith the LORD; *do they* not *provoke* themselves to the confusion of their own faces? Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched. . . . Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded *him* to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die. Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant? And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the LORD. When the princes of Judah heard these things, then they came up from the king's house unto the house of the LORD, and sat down in the entry of the new gate of the LORD'S *house*. Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man *is* worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears. Then spake Jeremiah unto all the princes and to all the people, saying, The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard. Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you. As for me, behold, I *am* in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the LORD hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears. Then said the princes and all the people unto the priests and to the prophets; This man *is* not worthy to die: for he hath spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God. Then rose up certain of the elders of the land, and spake to all the assembly of the people, saying, Micah the Morasthite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spake to all the people of

Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Zion shall be ploughed *like* a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest. Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him at all to death? did he not fear the LORD, and besought the LORD, and the LORD repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against them? Thus might we procure great evil against our souls. And there was also a man that prophesied in the name of the LORD, Urijah the son of Shemaiah of Kirjath-jearim, who prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah: and when Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men, and all the princes, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death: but when Urijah heard it, he was afraid, and fled, and went into Egypt; and Jehoiakim the king sent men into Egypt, *namely*, Elnathan the son of Achbor, and *certain* men with him into Egypt. And they fetched forth Urijah out of Egypt, and brought him unto Jehoiakim the king; who slew him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people. Nevertheless the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death.—JER. VII. 1–20; XXVI. 8–24.

Jer. vii. 1–20; xxvi. 8–24.

THIS is one of the great scenes of history. A pure-souled patriot stands charged with treason, a comrade of many

Condemned to death for treason, but no traitor.

In being loyal to the truth he seemed disloyal to the national cause. From time to time, especially in the confusion of national disasters, some of the noblest patriots have been suspected and condemned as unjustly, as mercilessly, as he was.

It is probable that in chap. vii. we have the incriminating address, and in chap. xxvi. the record of what followed its delivery.

The Prophet, early in Jehoiakim's reign, stood at

the gate of the Lord's house, when a feast or a fast in the religious calendar brought multitudes together. The first words must have startled many ears—*Amend your ways and your doings . . . trust ye not in lying words.* Before they knew it he was denouncing a popular formula of their day—supposed to have in it some magical virtue—and repeating it, *The temple of the Lord*, three times, with deepening scorn, we instinctively feel. In a like vein of irony, Augustine mimics the Manichees—"'The Truth, the Truth' they are always saying, and often said to me; but it was not in them" (*Confessions*, iii. 6). Nor was it "in" the people of Jerusalem when they fancied that they could safely sin under the protection of the temple: the building itself ensured their own and their city's immunity from harm; else where was God? They must have been bewildered, before they had time to be angry. They had used the formula so often and so naturally, and thought it when they did not say it.

Jer. vii. 1–20; xxvi. 8–24. v. 3. Vain Repetitions. v. 4.

The people might very justly urge that the magnificent buildings *were* the temple of the Lord: why then should the Prophet find fault? He asks them if they live the temple-life; if their social conduct harmonises with their festival psalms; if their trading and marketing sincerely reflect the flame of their sacrifices? He who buys and sells justly, he who takes no advantage of the defenceless, the stranger, the widow, the orphan; he who walks not after strange gods to his own hurt—he has won the right to say "The temple of the Lord" and to dwell securely in the land. But that was

vv. 4–7. A Den of Thieves—no Shelter.

Jer. vii. 1–20; xxvi. 8–24.

not Jerusalem's record, as the Prophet saw it day after day. The Ten Commandments were trodden under foot, to the tune of foreign idolatries. Theft, adultery, perjury, murder, Baalism, stained their lives; nevertheless they showily frequented the Temple: *ye come and stand before Me, in this house, which is called by My Name, and say, We are delivered: that ye may do all these abominations*—they used their deliverance to have more freedom to sin! Who that has read, in pre-Reformation chronicles, statements of the infamous abuse of Indulgences—or the denunciations of simony by Dante (cp. *Inferno*, canto xix.)—or Pascal's disclosures, in his *Provincial Letters*, of Jesuit casuistry condoning flagrant immoralities—who that has read such testimonies will say that Jeremiah has exaggerated in this picture of his contemporaries rushing from the threshold of deliverance to indulge in fresh abominations? *Is this house, which is called by My Name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?* Religious formalism always ends in breeding and sheltering an unclean life.

vv. 8–12.

Shiloh for a Sign.

God, they glibly protested—in demeanour if not in words—would never suffer His temple to be destroyed or defiled, and therefore they would be secure in its shelter. The Prophet replied by pointing to the destruction of Shiloh, once the national shrine. The wickedness of Israel had brought dishonour and ruin upon that sanctuary of the North; and now Judah was following in the same evil way. *I spake unto you rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye*

vv. 13, 14.

answered not: therefore will I do unto the house which is called by My name, wherein ye trust . . . as I have done unto Shiloh. Six centuries later a Greater than Jeremiah, in another Temple on the same historic site, warned His contemporaries against the like false security, declaring that not one stone would be left upon another in those "great buildings" either. And that later audience, instead of giving heed to the warning, was also moved to a like murderous wrath.

Jer. vii. 1–20; xxvi. 8–24. Mark xiii. 2.

What follows is told in chap. xxvi. As though it were a national rehearsal for the darker tragedy of Calvary, when he had made an end of speaking, *the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold on him, saying, Thou shalt surely die.* The prophets looked upon themselves as specially the guardians of the Name of the Lord, and the priests upon themselves as guardians of the Temple: in their view, Jeremiah was guilty of double blasphemy (cp. xviii. 18). The people crowded the very Temple whose downfall he had dared to foretell, and they were equally thirsty for his blood, remembering many another bitter word and song of his: but this was wormwood and gall—Jerusalem's Temple to be like Shiloh's sanctuary!

xxvi. v. 28.

For him, in that as in a darker hour, help came from an unexpected quarter. The rumour of the tumult swiftly spread and brought on the scene, before it was too late, "the princes of Judah"—probably members of the royal house and the highest officials of state. They sat in "the entry of the new gate" of the Temple, for judgement

"The Lord sent me."

Jer. vii. 1–20; xxvi. 8–24.

(Ps. cxxii. 5). The priests and prophets shouted their accusation, endeavouring to forestall just sentence by appealing to the crowd: *This man is worthy of death; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears.* Calm and unflinching he stands, and with pathetic dignity defends himself. He was no self-appointed harbinger of woe—*The Lord sent me.* He had spoken, not to bring destruction upon them, but with a view to avert it: *Amend your ways*—even at this late hour—*and the Lord will repent Him of the evil that He hath pronounced against you.* He withdraws not a word; face to face with death, he wears his crown of truth, then as often before and since a crown of thorns—prickly, but blossoming. *Behold, I am in your hand: do with me as is good and right in your eyes. Only know ye for certain that, if ye put me to death, ye shall bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the Lord hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears.* At the moment there was nothing greater in the history of the world, than this lonely man standing for his conviction of God's truth in the shelter of God's unseen hand. It relates itself readily to "the greatest scene in Modern European History," as Carlyle has described it, when Luther, on the 17th of April, 1521, in the Diet of Worms declared, "Here stand I; I can do no other: God help me!"

v. 11.

v. 12.

v. 13.

v. 14.

Jeremiah found a juster tribunal than our Lord found. The princes—and even the people—felt convinced of his sincerity, and threw over priests

and prophets: *This man is not worthy of death; for he hath spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God.* Some of "the elders of the land" quoted a precedent from the days of King Hezekiah, when Micaiah the Morasthite had proclaimed that Zion would be "ploughed as a field"; yet Hezekiah did not put him to death, but repented and intreated "the favour of the Lord" and won reprieve. Jeremiah was acquitted, but his life was by no means safe. The story of another—an unknown—prophet is added, Uriah by name, vindictively pursued into Egypt by order of King Jehoiakim, fetched back and slain with the king's sword. The story is inserted evidently to show that Jeremiah's life was still threatened, both by the king and the more unruly mob; but he found a patron in Ahikam, a member of the deputation to Huldah the prophetess after the finding of the Book of the Law; a Sir John Oldcastle of another day, not afraid of sheltering the "poor priests" of the Lollard movement.

Jer. vii. 1–20; xxvi. 8–24. vv. 15–24. 2 Kings xxii. 12–14.

Delivered from imminent death, but forced into hiding, reaction would naturally follow—as the Wartburg period came into Luther's experience. A man of such quick sympathies as Jeremiah was, was hurt by his own honest speaking; wounding others, he was more deeply wounded himself. Human compassion interwove itself with his utterance of Divine decrees; when his mouth was stern, his heart was pitiful and gentle. Were he all hardness, or were he all softness, truth in either case would suffer wrong. But he endures and carries on his task courageously,

The Suffering Servant.

Jer. vii. 1–20 ; xxvi. 8–24.

crowned with attributes of woe
Like glories.

But the "glories" at times were heavy to bear. If, returning to chap. vii., we may find in it (vv. 16–30) the soliloquy of the Prophet after his contest with the priests and prophets, we can understand its meaning better. He felt his heart shutting in upon itself: God surely was taking from him, for the time at least, the relief of praying for the stiff-necked wayward city and its careless multitudes.

vii. 16. *Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to Me; for I will not hear thee.* However solemn the mystery may be, it stands confirmed that there are Divine boundaries set, either in range or season, to the office of intercession. Even our Lord, in

John xvii. 9. His Highpriestly prayer, was conscious of this limit when He said, "I pray not for the world." *

The Hearth debased.

vv. 17, 18. And the idolatrous sights, blazing themselves before Jeremiah's eyes, were enough to dry up and chill the warmest, gentlest heart. *Seest thou what they do in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger.* Family worship—lovely among the loveliest means of grace—prostituted! so that even the children are involved in the foul rites. It is not

* The subject is further treated in Chapter XIII. of this volume.

only to-day's purity that is stained through and through, but to-morrow's as well: for what good or evil has hold of to-day's child possesses the morrow. A generation that robs its children of God and purity will have a fearful account to render. Jer. vii. 1–20; xxvi. 8–24.

Did they really believe that they could thus spite "the true God, the living God, the everlasting King"? Can the smoke of dry gorse, set on fire some February afternoon, smirch the sun? The smoke will, rather, in a sudden variable gust, fill the eyes of the burners. Sin grieves, but cannot harm, God; sin harms, though it may not grieve, the sinner. *Do they provoke Me to anger? saith the Lord; do they not provoke themselves to the confusion of their own faces?* Men may grieve the Holy Spirit of God, when they sin without a blush, but they cannot cause Him damage; but they damage themselves, and though they do not grieve at the moment, "at the last it biteth like a serpent" (Prov. xxiii. 32). vv. 19, 20.

The temple itself was not safe from pollution. In this as in other abominations Manasseh had taught them the way, building altars for all the host of heaven in the temple-courts (2 Kings xxi. 2–9). He had done worse, he had "made his son pass through the fire," and so inaugurated the horror of the Valley of Hinnom; and the horrible cult was much in vogue in Jeremiah's day. *This is the nation that hath not hearkened to the voice of the Lord their God, nor received instruction: truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth.* Having broken faith with God, there is no trust between neighbours, or v. 28.

Jer. vii. 1–20 ; xxvi. 8–24.

even between brothers (ix. 4, 5) : the disease of the spirit eats its way through the whole social fabric. And as it was then, so will it always be (Luke xviii. 2) : false to God, false to man.

An Application

Bunyan, in his dark and prolonged spiritual conflict, discovered an instrument of self-torment in the command given Jeremiah not to pray for the people ; as he relates in *Grace Abounding :* " So, *Pray not for him, for I have rejected him,* yea, I thought that He had whispered this to some " of His people " already, only they durst not tell me so ; neither durst I ask them of it, for fear, if it should be so, it would make me quite beside myself : *Man knows the beginning of sin* (said Spira), *but who bounds the issues thereof ?* " It is better that a man should lose his gold and all that he hath, than that he should be turned out of the prayers of the humblest of God's praying men.

A Supplication

We bless Thee, O Father of mercies, for the means of grace—for Thy word, Thy house, Thy day. But save us all from abusing Thy ordinances, by leaning upon them, while there is no residence for Thy Holy Spirit in our innermost soul. Save us continually, lest, in reading and committing Thy Word to our memory, we may keep it out of our conscience. Save us, lest, in observing Thy day, we spend our

other days away from Thee and Thy law of life. Save us, lest, in frequenting Thy House, we forget that we are in it to meet with Thee, and partake of Thy royal provisions, and prepare ourselves to feel at home in heaven. Amen.

Jer. vii. 1–20; xxvi. 8–24.

IX

"IN A STRAIT BETWIXT TWO"

Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! for they *be* all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men. And they bend their tongues *like* their bow *for* lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the LORD. Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders. And they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies, *and* weary themselves to commit iniquity. Thine habitation *is* in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know me, saith the LORD. . . . Shall I not visit them for these *things?* saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this? For the mountains will I take up a weeping and wailing, and for the habitations of the wilderness a lamentation, because they are burned up, so that none can pass through *them;* neither can *men* hear the voice of the cattle; both the fowl of the heavens and the beast are fled; they are gone. And I will make Jerusalem heaps, *and* a den of dragons; and I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without an inhabitant. . . . Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Consider ye, and call for the mourning women, that they may come; and send for cunning *women,* that they may come: and let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters. For a voice of wailing is heard

out of Zion, How are we spoiled! we are greatly confounded, because we have forsaken the land, because our dwellings have cast *us* out. Yet hear the word of the LORD, O ye women, and let your ear receive the word of his mouth, and teach your daughters wailing, and every one her neighbour lamentation. For death is come up into our windows, *and* is entered into our palaces, to cut off the children from without, *and* the young men from the streets. . . . Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty *man* glory in his might, let not the rich *man* glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I *am* the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these *things* I delight, saith the LORD. . . . We looked for peace, but no good *came*; *and* for a time of health, and behold trouble! The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan: the whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones; for they are come, and have devoured the land, and all that is in it; the city, and those that dwell therein. For, behold, I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you, which *will* not *be* charmed, and they shall bite you, saith the LORD. *When* I would comfort myself against sorrow, my heart *is* faint in me. Behold the voice of the cry of the daughter of my people because of them that dwell in a far country: *Is* not the LORD in Zion? *is* not her king in her? Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images, *and* with strange vanities? The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me. *Is there* no balm in Gilead; *is there* no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?—JER. IX. 1–6, 9–11, 17–21, 23, 24; VIII. 15–22.

IN the Hebrew Bible the first verse of chap. ix. is attached to chap. viii., and so concludes a lyric of national mourning; and the second verse is the first strain of quite another lyric of personal despondency and protest. Thus they express two wholly different moods. In one mood the prophet identifies himself with the miseries and remorse of his people—or that portion of his people in exile, dwelling "in a

Jer. ix. 1–6, 9–11, 17–21, 23, 24; viii. 15–22.

Jer. ix. 1–6, 9–11, 17–21, 23, 24 ; viii. 15–22.

far country." In the other mood, sick with the obstinate wickedness of those who still remained in their native land, he would fain, like the Psalmist, borrow the wings of a dove for flight into distant solitude. The solitary mood, the vicarious mood—they are both human ; but the latter is human, inspired and made valid by the Divine.

The solitary mood varies greatly. In its mild, half-formed desires it comes to all at times. Our Saviour knew it and felt the need of retreat, with His disciples, to peaceful solitudes. At one time it is this Jerusalem of Jeremiah that became also to Him intolerable : He " escaped out of their hand, and went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized." Another time it is the strain of life in Galilean mission work, and the martyrdom of John the Baptist, that made Him say, " Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile." So anxious was He for quiet, that " they departed into a desert place by ship *privately*." This quite natural desire may easily be exaggerated and abused, producing not only the recluse and the anchorite, but the mad dervish of the desert.

Chap. IX. There was no Brother.

Jeremiah in this mood could not protect his soul from ugly visions of sin and the repulsive hardness of sinners. He felt himself assaulted from every side by the flying arrows of wickedness : his " habitation " was *in the midst of deceit*. They prosper, *they are grown strong in the land, but not for truth*. There is no valour for truth, no heroism of fidelity to the purest and best. Nor is it indolent

v. 6.

iv. 3.

wickedness: *they proceed from evil to evil.* There was a plague of treachery; a brother would supplant his brother, and gloat over his cunning. Sin had become a laborious task, a wasting campaign, they *weary themselves to commit iniquity.* Every sinful pleasure impoverishes body, mind, or spirit—in the end all three. Sooner or later, the weariness must come, "disgust and secret loathing" must fall on the pleasure-hunters— Jer. ix. 1–6, 9–11, 17–21, 23, 24; viii. 15–22.

> Deep weariness and sated lust,

which "make human life a hell." Sin is too expensive in every way.

They know not Me, saith the Lord. Some kind of intellectual knowledge of God, they may have; but saving, quickening knowledge, it is not. *They have forsaken My law which I have set before them and have not obeyed My voice.* They knew the law, they heard the voice, but they did not listen-in. Their stubborn hearts found the Baalim so much pleasanter, and they refused to count the cost. *Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people and go from them!* v. 3. v. 13. v. 2.

Nor can their rioting and all their arts of deceit silence the hour of approaching doom in his prophetic ear. Already it is time to train for sorrow: the prophet himself would prepare to weep for the devastated hills and the burnt pastures; the lowing of cattle and the song of birds are silent, because beast and bird are gone. It is time to summon the wailing women, and for mothers to teach their vv. 10–18. The Shadow in the Window.

Jer. ix. 1–6, 9–11, 17–21, 23, 24; viii. 15–22.

daughters to sing funeral dirges. *For death is come up into our windows, it is entered into our palaces.* Windows made for light, palaces for pleasures—now darkened and devastated by death!—and children's play and youth's laughter as silent in the streets as the song of birds in the fields. "Oh that I had wings like a dove!"

v. 21. Psalm lv. 6.

Does not the prophet speak to us in these very days? Can we easily turn away from this stern sad face, and say—"But *we* are valiant for truth, honourable in our dealings; *we* practise no deceit in trade, or literature, or art, or religion; we walk daily in brotherly love and neighbourly goodwill; *we* do not starve our souls pursuing empty mirth, *we* do not weary ourselves in wickedness"? Shall we not rather consider our ways, and confess sincerely our bitter disappointment over our foolish wanderings from God? and pray—

From doubt, where all is double;
Where wise men are not strong,
Where comfort turns to trouble,
Where just men suffer wrong;
Where sorrow treads on joy,
Where sweet things soonest cloy,
Where faiths are built on dust,
Where love is half mistrust,
Hungry, and barren, and sharp as the sea—
Oh! set us free.

vv. 23–26.

Men are drawn away from God—now, as then—by the allurements of earthly wisdom, power, riches; although neither wisdom nor power nor riches, apart from God, can be of permanent value.

"He in whom the fear of sin comes before wisdom," said Rabbi Hanina, of the first century, "his wisdom shall endure; but he in whom wisdom comes before the fear of sin, his wisdom will not endure"—nor will power, or riches. *Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.* To know God, by loving Him, and delighting in the things that are His delight; to glory in His lovingkindness by accepting His forgiveness, and in His righteousness by letting Him make us righteous—this is the purest wisdom, the all-conquering might, the lasting riches.

Jer. ix. 1–6, 9–11, 17–21, 23, 24; viii. 15–22. v. 24.

Retreating into God.

Here Jeremiah found refuge. The escape from the lordship of the ascetic mood in its more selfish form comes by way of a more habitual retreat into God, and drinking out of the deeper springs of His consolation (Ps. xxxvi. 9). Of Kathleen Lyttelton it has been told how she ruled her natural love for contemplative retirement in this way. She claimed that "there was no need to fly to some wilderness and bury oneself in solitude. The soul could learn, by resolute practice, the habit of retreating into the spiritual recesses that lie behind life; so that, for it, the way was ever open, even though it lived and worked in familiar touch with the world of action." * And when that world of action becomes, as in Jeremiah's experience, a world of contention and bitter strife, of heavy obstacles to the progress of

* Biographical Note to her edition of the *Spiritual Guide* of Molinos (Methuen).

Jer. ix. 1–6, 9–11, 17–21, 23, 24 ; viii. 15–22.

truth and the promotion of goodness—a world, even, of seeming failure and recurring defeats of the best—to stay in the midst of it all, bravely carrying on by constantly refreshing one's self in God, the Fountain of living waters, is the nobler and safer choice. He sighed for release, but he stayed ; the moan of his soul increased the worth of his loyalty to his task.

II

We now return to the preceding lyric, which seems to sob itself into our ears. *Oh that I could comfort myself against sorrow ! my heart is faint within me.* He is contemplating the widespread miseries of his stricken compatriots in *a land that is very far off.* Their moanings, as though borne by the passing wind, become painfully audible to him : *Is not the Lord in Zion ? is not her King in her ?* Alas ! her King is there, but neglected of her and dishonoured : so He answers for Himself, in the prophet's soul—*Why have they provoked Me to anger with their graven images, and with strange vanities ?* And again the moaning is in his ears, deepened into blank despair : *The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.* The double harvest had failed, the earlier one of corn, the later one of fruits : there was no longer any hope left. The use of this great text to warn men against neglecting their soul's eternal salvation has been richly blessed ; but probably their first application was to the nation's despair in captivity. Or else the Prophet was adding his own and deeper meaning to their cry. For he

viii. 18.

v. 19.

Woe of the Neglected Harvest.

v. 20.

was one with them: *For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt.* He is now the whole-hearted intercessor, wounded himself with the wounds of the nation's soul. For thus he asks—*Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there?* The balm of Gilead held first place in the medicinal repertory of the day: if that failed, there was nothing left. But the proverb is used with a larger meaning: has Judah become incurable even to the mercy of God? It is with this dread thought pressing him down that the lyric closes:

Jer. ix. 1–6, 9–11, 17–21, 23, 24; viii. 15–22.
v. 21.
v. 22.
Incurable?
ix. 1.

> Oh that my head were waters,
> And mine eyes a fountain of tears,
> That I might weep day and night
> For the slain of the daughter of my people!

Surely he had entered the holy of holies of vicarious suffering and intercession; in his tears there was a mingling of a sense of the sin and sorrow of his people and of a God neglected and His mercy refused. Of the Franciscan mystic and poet, Jacopone di Todi, it is recorded that "for many years before his death he did not cease to weep; and when he was asked wherefore he wept, he replied, 'I weep, because Love is not loved.'" Jeremiah spent the strength of his body and mind, and all the strength of his affection, to plead the cause of Divine Mercy. But the harvest came to an end, and summer was passing, and yet Love was not loved.

An Application

The Lord's servant cannot retire merely because the task is arduous and the fruit scanty. If he has

Jer. ix. 1–6, 9–11, 17–21, 23, 24 ; viii. 15–22.

grown physically or intellectually incapable, that would naturally procure him his release ; but neither opposition, however persistent, nor spare harvesting, or both together, can be sufficient ground for throwing up one's appointed task. But it is ground enough for constantly repairing to God for counsel, and for recovery of soul. Hindrances and failures point not to our retirement from work, but to our falling back on the ampler supply of Divine grace. A lodge in the wilderness will afford no permanent or comfortable refuge to the deserter, but it may be at times a fit and lawful retreat for the wounded and the battle-worn. If he can take God with him there, it is evidence of his right of residence for a while.

A Supplication

Have pity upon us, O God of love, if we are often onlookers rather than fellow-sufferers with those for whom we pray. We bless Thee that Thy Beloved Son is still, in heaven, touched with the feeling of our infirmities ; He is still within our circle, sinful and erring though we be, while He ever lives to make intercession for us. Give us of His Spirit, that we may suffer with those who sin, and mourn with those who regret their backslidings—and mourn even for those who have no care for their own soul. Amen.

X

AGAINST ALL MANNER OF IDOLS

Hear ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you, O house of Israel: Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people *are* vain: for *one* cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They *are* upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also *is it* in them to do good. Forasmuch as *there is* none like unto thee, O LORD; thou *art* great, and thy name *is great* in might. Who would not fear thee, O King of nations? for to thee doth it appertain: forasmuch as among all the wise *men* of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, *there is* none like unto thee. But they are altogether brutish and foolish; the stock is a doctrine of vanities. . . . But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, and an everlasting king. . . . Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, *even* they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens. He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion. When he uttereth his voice, *there is* a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures. Every man is brutish in *his* knowledge: every founder is confounded by the graven image: for his molten image *is* falsehood, and *there is* no breath in them. They *are* vanity, *and* the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish. The portion of Jacob *is* not like them: for he *is* the former of all

things ; and Israel *is* the rod of his inheritance : The LORD of hosts *is* his name. Gather up thy wares out of the land, O inhabitant of the fortress. For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will sling out the inhabitants of the land at this once, and will distress them, that they may find *it so.* Woe is me for my hurt ! my wound is grievous : but I said, Truly this *is* a grief, and I must bear it. . . . For the pastors are become brutish, and have not sought the LORD : therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered. . . . O LORD, I know that the way of man *is* not in himself : *it is* not in man that walketh to direct his steps. O LORD, correct me, but with judgment ; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing.—JER. x. 1–8, 10–19, 21, 23, 24.

Jer. x. 1–8, 10–19, 21, 23, 24.

IN reading a chapter like this, we may try to arm ourselves against its piercing irony, by saying—" It has no message for *us :* it deals with wooden idols and their stupid devotees ; we have long ago risen out of all that. *We* do not cut a tree out of the forest, deck it with silver and gold, fasten it with nails and with hammers to make it stand against the wall, tall and immovable—a very scarecrow in the end !—and call it a god." But the escape is not so easily made as that. The fashion in idols changes : idolatry remains. Whatever puts God out of His place in our life is an idol, whether it banishes Him altogether or gives Him a second place. An over-careful wife and mother may make an idol of her home and lose her soul in house-pride ; the scholar may make a god of his book-learning, his grammars and dictionaries ; the tradesman may turn his shop into a heathen temple ; the farmer may utter his sincerest liturgies to Mammon in his barns ; the mechanic may care more for his hammer than his soul. Whatever form, substantial or ethereal, the idol may take, in the end *it is but a stock.* And the

Fashions in Idols.

tragedy of it all is that idols are mostly ideals marred, beautiful palm-trees hewn and degraded into "scarecrows"! The home is sweet, scholarship is desirable, trade is beneficent—if God be given the first place: without Him, it is but a stock. Jer. x. 1–8, 10–19, 21, 23, 24. v. 8.

How very like all this is the incident in John Knox's life, as a galley-slave in France—especially in Carlyle's way of telling it: "In the galleys of the river Loire whither John Knox and the others . . . had been sent as galley-slaves, some officer or priest one day presented them an image of the Virgin Mother, requiring that they, the blasphemous heretics, should do it reverence. Mother? mother of God? said Knox, when the turn came to him: this is no mother of God; this is a '*pented bredd*'—a piece of wood, I tell you, with paint on it! She is fitter for swimming, I think, than for being worshipped, added Knox; and flung the thing into the river. It was not very cheap jesting there: but come of it what might, this thing to Knox was and must continue nothing other than the real truth; it was a *pented bredd:* worship it he would not." *It is but a stock.*

Over against these "vanities" Jeremiah proclaims the God he believes in. *There is none like unto Thee, O Lord.* God has no place in any pantheon: He is alone God. He is great, with a name that is great in might; He is the one King of the nations. He is God in truth, the living God, everlasting King. The gods that are made are all perishable: but He that made the earth by His power, and by His understanding stretched out the v. 6. The One True God.

Jer. x. 1–8, 10–19, 21, 23, 24. v. 13. heavens, He is in possession of eternity. As for the greatness of His might, *when He uttereth His voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; He maketh lightnings for the rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of His treasuries.* He is God of the dread thunder and the gentle mist, of the fierce lightning and soft rain. He tempers judgment with mercy, He uses His might wisely. The lightning is not for its own sake, but *for* the rain. That meant and means more in the East than here. A letter just received from Madagascar thus begins: "We have just had our first storm—thunder, lightning, and rain: but it has been a very short one. The garden looks quite fresh, and we already feel better ourselves. . . . We have scarcely seen even a *shower* of rain for six months, so that you can imagine how shrivelled and weary we were feeling. We have tried, as usual in the dry season, to keep our garden from becoming a 'waste, howling wilderness,' by having it constantly watered, but with a tropical sun overhead it is often *nearly* a hopeless business. Now this evening a single brief storm seems to have brightened up everything." v. 11. *He maketh lightning for the rain.* Perishable gods—how can they rule the clouds of earth's centuries and millenniums? why should the foolish heart of man turn to them?

Which of the stocks or stones they trust
Can give them showers of rain?
In vain they worship glittering dust,
And pray to gold in vain.

The Portion of Jacob is not like these ; for He is the Former of all things. And yet Jacob neglects and forsakes his Portion, is bent on forfeiting his Inheritance. Therefore to Jacob must be doled out the wages of his sin. As in a sudden lightning flash, the prophet sees Jerusalem preparing for a state of siege, gathering up its wares to safeguard them within the walls. But there is no safeguarding wares or human lives : *I will sling out the inhabitants of the land at this time.* The prophet recoils from the dread vision ; he meekly cries not for himself alone, but as though he were the penitent voice of the stricken people—*Woe is me for my hurt ! my wound is grievous : but I said, Truly this is my grief, and I must bear it.* So the prophet—now a priest in pitiful intercession—idealizes the penitence of his Jerusalem. If only she would join in the lowly litany, confessing her sin and bearing the just burden of her judgement with chastened soul—*I must bear it*—there would yet dawn a day of grace for her. But she will not have it so ; even her shepherds give no lead in asking for " the old paths where is the good way." *Therefore they have not prospered, and all their flocks are scattered*—which is true of " brutish " shepherds for all time.

Once again the prophet turns to his darkened lonely way, to pray in solitude over his own sorrow —the sorrow of the rejected servant of God. Why cannot the sincere preacher of truth command success ? He is not chasing pleasure, he is not hoarding gold, he does not curry favour, he does not court fame : he tries at his very best to tell people

Jer. x. 1–8, 10–19, 21, 23, 24.

v. 16. Jacob disinherits himself.

v. 18.

v. 19.

v. 21.

v. 23.

Jer. x. 1–8, 10–19, 21, 23, 24.

the truth that will save them. Does he not deserve to succeed in his task? The question is old, and yet ever new. There is no complete reply here on earth: submission and fidelity are our comfort and stay. *O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.* Prosperity, even in noblest tasks, is not at his disposal; there is no insurance against failure for prophet or apostle. Even Christ had to visit places where His work of love was thwarted by men's unbelief. But failure is not meant to enfeeble our strength, or paralyse our efforts. It is correction, with a view to our tasting more amply of the provisions of redeeming grace. *O Lord, correct me, but with judgment; not in Thine anger, lest Thou bring me to nothing.* "The way of man," says Thomas à Kempis, "is not always in his power, but it belongeth unto God to give, and to comfort, when He will, and how much He will, and whom He will; as it shall please Him, and no more." "Thy way, not mine, O Lord," Dr. Horatius Bonar asked—

Man's Life beyond Man's Rule.

v. 24.

Smooth let it be or rough,
It will be still the best;
Winding or straight, it leads
Right onward to Thy rest.

An Application

Nothing is easier than to denounce eloquently the sin of idolatry—the idolatry of others. It is our own idol which we find costly to give up, not the idols of others.

All the vain things that charm *me* most,
I sacrifice—*them*—to His blood.

And Cowper also knew how hard it was to give up his own— Jer. x. 1–8, 10–19, 21, 23, 24.

> The dearest idol I have known,
> Whate'er *that* idol be,
> Help me to tear—*it*—from Thy throne,
> And worship only Thee.

To " tear it "—the tragedy of many a Great Refusal is in the cry, and also the victory of many a noble renunciation.

A Supplication

There is none like unto Thee, O Lord. Then why vv. 6. 10. do we act and live as though there were others like unto Thee, more to be obeyed and honoured than Thou ? Thou art the true God ; then why do we wander in search of truth away from Thee ? Thou art the living God ; and yet there are many who do not come to Thee for life, but die in the darkness of sin. Thou art the King of the nations ; then why do the nations not have Thee to reign over them, for their good now and always ? O Thou alone God, true and living, everlasting King, help us to rise to the majesty of the names by which we call Thee. Amen.

XI

"BAFFLED—TO FIGHT BETTER"

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Hear ye the words of this covenant, and speak unto the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel; Cursed *be* the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant, Which I commanded your fathers in the day *that* I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Obey my voice, and do them, according to all which I command you: so shall ye be my people, and I will be your God: that I may perform the oath which I have sworn unto your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as *it is* this day. Then answered I, and said, So be it, O LORD. Then the LORD said unto me, Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying, Hear ye the words of this covenant, and do them. For I earnestly protested unto your fathers in the day *that* I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, *even* unto this day, rising early and protesting, saying, Obey my voice. Yet they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear, but walked every one in the imagination of their evil heart: therefore I will bring upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded *them* to do; but they did *them* not. And the LORD said unto me, A conspiracy is found among the men of Judah, and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refused to hear my words; and they went after other gods to serve them: the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers. . . . For *according to* the number of thy cities were thy gods, O Judah; and *according to* the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set

up altars to *that* shameful thing, *even* altars to burn incense unto Baal. . . . And the LORD hath given me knowledge *of it*, and I know *it*: then thou shewedst me their doings. But I *was* like a lamb *or* an ox *that* is brought to the slaughter; and I knew not that they had devised devices against me, *saying*, Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered. But, O LORD of hosts, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I revealed my cause. Therefore thus saith the LORD of the men of Anathoth, that seek thy life, saying, Prophesy not in the name of the LORD, that thou die not by our hand: therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, I will punish them: the young men shall die by the sword; their sons and their daughters shall die by famine: and there shall be no remnant of them: for I will bring evil upon the men of Anathoth, *even* the year of their visitation. . . . Righteous *art* thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of *thy* judgements: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? *wherefore* are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit: thou *art* near in their mouth, and far from their reins. But thou, O LORD, knowest me: thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee: pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter. How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? the beasts are consumed, and the birds; because they said, He shall not see our last end. If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and *if* in the land of peace, *wherein* thou trustedst, *they wearied thee*, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan? For even thy brethren, and the house of thy father, even they have dealt treacherously with thee; yea, they have called a multitude after thee: believe them not, though they speak fair words unto thee. I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies. Mine heritage is unto me as a lion in the forest; it crieth out against me: therefore have I hated it. . . . They have sown wheat, but shall reap thorns; they have put themselves to pain, but shall not profit; and they shall be ashamed of your revenues, because of the fierce anger of the LORD. Thus saith the LORD against all mine evil

neighbours, that touch mine inheritance which I have caused my people Israel to inherit; Behold, I will pluck them out of their land, and pluck out the house of Judah from among them. And it shall come to pass, after that I have plucked them out I will return, and have compassion on them, and will bring them again, every man to his heritage, and every man to his land. And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, The LORD liveth; as they taught my people to swear by Baal; then shall they be built in the midst of my people. But if they will not obey, I will utterly pluck up and destroy that nation, saith the LORD.—JER. XI. 1–10, 13, 18–23; XII. 1–8, 13–17.

Jer. xi. 1–10, 13, 18–23; xii. 1–8, 13–17.

THE discovery of the Deuteronomic code in Josiah's reign, and the reformation which it promised, and partly effected at first, must have been as the dawn of hope to devout souls. Jeremiah hailed it and expected much from it; though, all too soon, he had to suffer keen disillusionment. He was early in the field as its advocate and missionary. *Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Cursed be the man that heareth not the words of the covenant. . . Then answered I and said, Amen, O Lord.* To the contents of the discovered book—"its monotheism, its horror of idolatry, its warm humanitarianism, its lofty morality, its abhorrence of heathen abominations, its demand that life should be controlled by whole-hearted love of God—to these Jeremiah would say 'Amen' with all his soul," remarks Dr. Peake.

v. 3.

Treachery in Anathoth.

He became, at God's behest, an itinerant evangelist of reform, by means of song and address, in the streets of Jerusalem, in the cities of Judah. Whatever bright expectations he cherished at first, and however bravely he fought against disillusionment,

the chill came. There was, first of all, a personal shock. Anathoth had its sanctuary which was banned by the reforming Law (Deut. xii. 5–14). The priests of that sanctuary belonged to the deposed house of Abiathar (1 Kings ii. 26, 27); they also were now excommunicated. And yet Jeremiah, their fellow-villager and kinsman, was among the stoutest defenders of a centralising, exclusive movement that dishonoured them, and disfranchised their village. Such parochial treason was not to be tolerated: they started a secret plot against his life. He went in and out among them, all unsuspicious of their treachery: *I was like a gentle lamb that is led to the slaughter*—innocent, trustful, engaged in other thoughts. The true reformer loses himself in the ardour of reform. "Who is blind as he that is at peace with Me [made perfect, margin R.V.]? and blind as the Lord's servant?"

Jer. xi. 1–10, 13, 18–23; xii. 1–8, 13–17.

v. 19.

Isa. xlii. 19.

The Lord gave me knowledge of it. Their devices and doings seemed so much meaner in the fresh light of a promising dawn. It was all so cold-blooded, so unrestrained: *Let us destroy the tree with the fruit thereof, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered.* He put his case in God's hand—Thou *judgest righteously*—let God deal with them, Who punishes as righteously as He judges. Let the prophet continue in his task, protected by God's arm and word.

v. 20.

There was another, more sinister conspiracy on foot—all too soon—among the men of Judah and among the citizens of Jerusalem, a conspiracy against

Too many Gods.

Jer. xi. 1–10, 13, 18–23; xii. 1–8, 13–17.

God and pure religion. *They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refused to hear My words.* There was a counter-reformation stealthily active. *For according to the number of thy cities were thy gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set up altars to that shameful thing, even altars to burn incense unto Baal.* The multiplication of "gods," in their ancient or modern guise, is the most serious menace to national unity. Idolatries work for dissolution. And the prophet felt the oppression of it—the swift backsliding, the eager return to the way of Manasseh. He was so oppressed, that prayer for the people was slain in his soul. *Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them.* How could prayer be made for those who doated on wicked rites? *When thou doest evil then thou rejoicest.* And yet once Israel was so full of spiritual promise: *the Lord called thy name, A green olive tree, fair with goodly fruit.* And now it seems to prepare itself for the fire: barren of the fruits of goodness, with faded leaves and withered branches; God Himself will kindle the fire to burn it up!

v. 10.
v. 13.
v. 14.
v. 15.
v. 16.

xii. 1–4. Prosperity of the Wicked.

Still oppressed with the treachery of Anathoth and the fickleness of Judah, the prophet comes up against the old and ever new problem of the mystery of suffering. How can a righteous Ruler of the universe suffer *the way of the wicked to prosper? Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root; they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit: Thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins.* They were his adversaries, opponents at heart of the Deutero-

nomic reformation, naming Jehovah's name by Baal's altars and in the blood-stained vale of Hinnom—favourites of the royal house, popular, prosperous. And he, defender of God's truth, open to insidious attack, royal disfavour, and popular contempt. *Thou seest me, and triest mine heart toward Thee.* It is the Book of Job in miniature: and no direct answer from God is reported—any more than in that book. The answer is rather a challenge to the prophet's greater courage, in some of the most thrilling sentences of his poetic fire: Jer. xi. 1–10, 13, 18–23; xii. 1–8, 13–17.

Fight well to-day, to fight better to-morrow.

If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, v. 5.
Then how canst thou contend with horses?
And though in a land of peace thou art not secure,
Yet how wilt thou do in the pride of Jordan?

—the "pride" of Jordan probably denoting the rank growth, lion-haunted, along both its banks in places. The comfort of the Divine answer is in its fortitude. The troubles which had hitherto assailed him were meant to train him for worse. "It is the strain that ever brings the strength," is Sir George Adam Smith's interpretation: "life is explained as a graded and progressively strenuous discipline, the result of it a stronger and more finely tempered soul." We are trained and strengthened, in bravely bearing the lighter crosses of life, for its heavier ones; in fighting minor doubts and fears, to meet darker misgivings and unnamed terrors. Lifelong is the mighty struggle of the soul for ultimate triumph. "Soon may a man lose that by negligence," says Jeremy Taylor in his *Golden Grove*, "which hath by much labour and a long time

Jer. xi. 1–10, 13, 18–23; xii. 1–8, 13–17.

and a mighty grace scarcely been obtained. And what shall become of us before night, who are weary so early in the morning? Woe be to that man who would be at rest, even when he hath scarcely a footstep of holiness appearing in his conversation."

In the Prophet's experience God was scant in His consolations; but the discipline was for the sake of strengthening his spirit, of hardening him for nobler endurance. He was to expect no help except from God: *for even thy brethren and the house of thy father even they have dealt treacherously with thee.* The home at Anathoth, like the home at Nazareth (John vii. 3–7), made more bitter the cup of trial for its noblest son.

v. 6.

vv. 8–13.

From his own personal trials and questionings he is called to his inexorable task. Some fresh peril threatens the land—the "clouds returning after the rain"—and Judah is like a speckled bird chased and wounded by neighbouring nations as birds of prey. Why? Because she, the dearly beloved of the Lord's soul, has become His foe, roaring against Him *as a lion in the forest.* She has been misguided by her shepherds, her political leaders and her religious teachers; and she is left desolate, no man laying it to heart. God's anger against the baseness of it all is turning their sown wheat into a harvest of thorns; *they have put themselves to pain, and profit nothing* (cp. James v. 1–3). They were ashamed of their revenues; therefore their revenues were not wealth.

True Inward Change.

v. 13.

And yet God cannot withdraw His mercy. In

the midst of calamities the light of the morning-star breaks for a moment through the heavy clouds. A promise of return from captivity to their own land is given; but the value of it for real restoration will be decided by the attitude and conduct of the returning exiles. Merely coming home from Babylon or elsewhere will not make of them a new nation. *If they will diligently learn the ways of My people* (*i.e.* not My people in name only, but in reality) . . . *then shall they be built up.* Mere geographical change will not of itself transform their lives: they must learn the ways of the godly and the good. And so must men still have an inward change before there can be lasting and thorough reconstruction. Neither leaving home for a new country, nor returning home after long exile, will of itself turn a soul to goodness. "Ye must be born from above" (John. iii. 7, margin R.V.).

Jer. xi. 1–10, 13, 18–23; xii. 1–8, 13–17.

v. 16.

An Application

The Prophet's experience in this as in other things is a way-mark on the heavenly road. How far can we all, in the service of highest Truth, cultivate real disinterestedness? so that there shall be "no question of supporting present hardships in the hope of a future prize in the way of peace; no question of an immediate sacrifice in the expectation of an ultimate exaltation." * Jeremiah was being severely schooled in the holy service of truth for its own sake; and whether the question came

* Nicholson: *The Mysticism of St. Francis of Assisi*, p. 266.

Jer. xi. 1–10, 13, 18–23; xii. 1–8, 13–17.

to him in the form we have given it or not, he has helped us to ask it. The last mercenary remnant had to be burnt out of his soul. "For a man's highest Good would be and truly is, that he should not seek himself nor his own things, nor be his own end in any respect . . . but should seek only the praise and glory of God and His holy will." So it is written in the *Theologia Germanica;* and the great suffering servants of God in all ages, and of many degrees, illustrate how hard is the attainment, yet how indispensable to the spiritual progress of the race.

A Supplication

Lord, suffer us not to fall behind in the open, peaceful land, where the footmen travel, lest we utterly fail in the jungle where the river flows deep and dark. Help us not to be offended with our Lord's piercing words among the Galilean hills, that we no more walk with Him; or else who will be His companions in Gethsemane? and who will stand near Him on Calvary? Thou crucified Lord Jesus Christ, let Thy Cross be our strength, and finally take us to Thyself to be with Thee in the Heavenly Father's realm. Amen.

John vi. 66.

XII

PARABLE AND PICTURE

Thus saith the LORD unto me, Go and get thee a linen girdle, and put it upon thy loins, and put it not in water. So I got a girdle according to the word of the LORD, and put *it* on my loins. And the word of the LORD came unto me the second time, saying, Take the girdle that thou hast got, which *is* upon thy loins, and arise, go to Euphrates, and hide it there in a hole of the rock. So I went, and hid it by Euphrates, as the LORD commanded me. And it came to pass after many days, that the LORD said unto me, Arise, go to Euphrates, and take the girdle from thence, which I commanded thee to hide there. Then I went to Euphrates, and digged, and took the girdle from the place where I had hid it: and, behold, the girdle was marred, it was profitable for nothing. Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Thus saith the LORD, After this manner will I mar the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem. This evil people, which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their heart, and walk after other gods, to serve them, and to worship them, shall even be as this girdle, which is good for nothing. For as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith the LORD; that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory: but they would not hear. Therefore thou shalt speak unto them this word; Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Every bottle shall be filled with wine: and they shall say unto thee, Do we not certainly know that every bottle shall be filled with wine? Then shalt thou say unto them, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will fill all the inhabitants of this land, even the kings that sit upon David's throne, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, with drunkenness.

And I will dash them one against another, even the fathers and the sons together, saith the LORD: I will not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy, but destroy them. Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud: for the LORD hath spoken. Give glory to the LORD your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, *and* make *it* gross darkness. But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for *your* pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the LORD'S flock is carried away captive. Say unto the king and to the queen, Humble yourselves, sit down: for your principalities shall come down, *even* the crown of your glory. The cities of the south shall be shut up, and none shall open *them:* Judah shall be carried away captive all of it, it shall be wholly carried away captive. Lift up your eyes, and behold them that come from the north: where *is* the flock *that* was given thee, thy beautiful flock? What wilt thou say when he shall punish thee? for thou hast taught them *to be* captains, *and* as chief over thee; shall not sorrows take thee, as a woman in travail? And if thou say in thine heart, Wherefore come these things upon me? For the greatness of thine iniquity are thy skirts discovered, *and* thy heels made bare. Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? *then* may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil. Therefore will I scatter them as the stubble that passeth away by the wind of the wilderness. This *is* thy lot, the portion of thy measures from me, saith the LORD; because thou hast forgotten me, and trusted in falsehood. Therefore will I discover thy skirts upon thy face, that thy shame may appear. I have seen thine adulteries, and thy neighings, the lewdness of thy whoredom, *and* thine abominations on the hills in the fields. Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean? when *shall it* once *be?*—JER. XIII. 1–27.

Jer. xiii. 1–27.

The Buried Girdle.

THE Prophet is charged to use one of his symbolic acts, in order to make an appeal to the eye as well as to the ear of his unheeding audience. He takes a linen waist-cloth and buries it in a fissure of the rock, through which the water soaked. Whether it was the river Euphrates, as it is rendered in the

Greek version, and ours, or the Wady Farah, within an hour of Anathoth,* makes no difference to the signification of the parable: nor again, if the long journey to the Euphrates is meant, whether the Prophet actually made it, as some think, or he intends it as an allegory. The cloth buried in a damp place, and rotten in consequence, and therefore to be cast away as worthless, is used to symbolise the people's moral corruption and their uselessness for God's holy purpose. *Behold the girdle was marred, it was profitable for nothing.* And the interpretation of the symbol, given as a word from God, was—*After this manner will I mar the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem.* The act of divine justice is co-ordinated to the disobedience of the people: the "marring" was really contained in their ungodly behaviour. God would have the whole nation cleave to Him, as the white linen girdle; but they chose to *walk in the stubbornness of their hearts, and go after other gods to serve them and to worship them.* God stamps with corruption what man has already made corruptible: as Jesus set the stamp of barrenness on the barren fig-tree.

Jer. xiii. 1–27.

v. 7.

v. 9.

v. 10.

If Jeremiah's audience was offended by the use of so unlovely a parable, they felt a sorer offence from his next attack. He quotes, or else makes, a proverbial saying—*Every bottle shall be filled with*

vv. 12–14.

A Proverb that Stung.

* So Sir George Adam Smith: *Jeremiah*, p. 184. "The name corresponds to the Hebrew *Pirath* (by a slight alteration) *Parah;* and the Wady, familiar as it must have been to Jeremiah, suits the picture, having a lavish fountain, a broad pool and a stream, all of which soak into the sand and fissured rock of the surrounding desert."

Jer. xiii. 1–27.

wine. It would sound to them so self-evident, that it would be like a mocking waste of words. And their reply would be—"Of course; everybody knows that." But he partly protected himself from mere disgust on their part, by introducing it as an authentic "Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel." And he proceeded to give the interpretation, that God would fill *them*—king, priest, prophet, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem—"with drunkenness"; they would be made drunk with the wine of their own pride, and God would dash them in that state—self-produced—against one another.

The connection between the parable and the proverb seems to be this: pride, stubborn and hostile to God, makes them corrupt, and God makes bare the corruption; or again, pride makes them drunk and God publishes and punishes their intoxication by making them the instruments of mutual destruction, as Dante describes the Avaricious and the Prodigal tormenting each other in an endless round of reciprocal hate.

The Sin of Pride.

The ravages of pride can scarcely be exaggerated; they are insidious, complex, vast, working in deadly secrecy and stillness, and exhaling a sweet poison. The vainglorious scholar, the smug Pharisee, the fashion-bound woman, the self-important official, the fame-bibbing public man, the arrogant rich, the popular babbler, the fallen angel—they are all overcome and marred and reduced to folly by the wine of their own pride. *Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud: for the Lord hath spoken.* Repent!

v. 15.

Repentance is humility, weeping and adoring.

It is giving glory to God, instead of vainly attempting to rob Him of it and wear it ourselves. It is not wise for any man to delay repenting, whatever pride may say. Are you pilgrims of pleasure, laughing in the sun on the slopes of unknown mountains, with wine-cups galore, and words and ways that are not clean? Have you forgotten the approach of night, or the sudden spreading of the mountain mist? What if the shining heights become "mountains of twilight" (v. 16, Heb.)? Do you say, "There will be a moon before long"? What if God should plunge His moon in the shadow of death, and leave you to stumble in gross darkness? Be not proud! Give glory to the Lord your God! Repent—now! *But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the Lord's flock is taken captive.*

Jer. xiii. 1–27.

Fear of the Darkened Heights.

v. 17.

The picture, though it seem vague and vast, is one of the indestructible and unforgettable creations of literature, and of the highest of all literature. Once it impresses itself on the mind, its very vagueness deepens its solemn appeal. For we *feel* it to be close to life. It came so close to its author as to affect him to tears; for what surges from the depths of the heart, pure and true, has power to return to the depths of that heart and many other hearts.

To Jeremiah the vision became suddenly concrete, also. He saw pride smitten in high places of state. The young King Jehoiachim and the queen-mother Nehushta are marked for captivity. *Say thou unto the king and unto the queen-mother, Humble*

Beginning of the End.

v. 18.

Jer. xiii. 1–27.

yourselves, sit down [sit ye down low, R.V. margin]. The sense of national pride as national disaster still haunts him. There is no escape except through the strait gate of repentance. For royalty or peasantry there is "none other way." Alas! the mountains of the pleasure-hunters are already gathering dusk. The invader, coming in from the north, has not only approached Jerusalem, but blockaded the cities of

v. 19.

the Negeb, "the Southland." *Judah is carried away captive—all of it:* and then to accentuate the universal ruin, the expression, slightly varied, is repeated—*it is wholly carried away captive.* All sin, not repented of, ends there, for the individual and the mass—"all of it . . . wholly captive." Sin, beguiling the soul from the service of God, leaves it in the meshes of total, irrevocable servitude. The next paragraph lends itself again to the same application.

Jerusalem is personified as a shepherdess, to whom God had entrusted His "beautiful flock." She had betrayed her trust, proved herself to be only an hireling shepherd. The invaders from the doom-laden north shall come and find the beautiful flock defenceless, and like a wolf, or worse, tear them to pieces. To add to the poignancy of her punishment, her own favoured friends—the friends for whom she had forsaken and neglected her Lord, whom she herself had instructed so sedulously—they will be set over her as head. *What wilt thou say?* What would Robespierre say to the guillotine for his own head? or Haman when he made his last journey to his own gallows?

Parable and Picture

The Prophet, with the dread future fearfully present to his timeless soul, seems to hear the bewildered, disillusioned city crying among her ruins: *Wherefore are these things come upon me?* The answer like the knell of all hope is—*For the greatness of thine iniquity.* And the bell mournfully tolls forth one of the greatest, most solemn questions of all time: *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?* Like many another great text, torn from its context and original application, it has been often misapplied. In Jeremiah's use of it, the reference was not to sin as inherent in man's nature, but to the tyranny of a sinful habit, as the conclusion of the verse shows: *then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.* Just as he opposed the false implication of the proverb about the sour grapes (xxxi. 29, 30) by a doctrine of individual responsibility, so here his grief is that the soul, though sinful, could have been cleansed from sin by the mercy of God. But they, by their stubbornness in evil habits had given neither their own soul nor God's mercy a chance.

Jer. xiii. 1–27. vv. 22–24.

What answer, then, had the Prophet to his own question? Taking in view the whole appeal of his ministry it would be this: The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, the leopard cannot change his, Israel—not *can* not, but—*will* not change their evil habits. There is a disability, owing to a long, wilful course of disobedience, but no fatal inability. Penitence on the people's part, though late, and the eternal wonder of God's compassion, would achieve the reform. It would be hard, it would be painful;

Jer. xiii. 1–27. xxxii. 17. xxxi. 34. but not too hard—"there is nothing too hard [wonderful, R.V. margin] for Thee"; nor too painful, in view of the result: "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more." That is the evangel of Jeremiah, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, Who is "able to save to the uttermost."

viii. 4. To take another of his brave questions—"Shall men fall, and not rise up again"? If a man, on a stumbling road, fall not once but seven times or more, will he not each time struggle to his feet, though hurt and bleeding, if he anyhow can? Why, then, should a human soul give up, even after iii. 22. a thousand falls (Matt. xviii. 24, 27)? "Return, ye backsliding children, I will heal your backslidings."

If Israel continues stubborn, and will not return, then they will be scattered far and wide—scattered v. 24. as the broken straw, in the whirl of the sirocco. *This is thy lot, the portion measured unto thee from Me,* v. 25. *saith the Lord.* "Measured . . . from Me": not the measure of Babylon, though Babylon be the instrument, but God's own measure. And all the time Jerusalem could, if she only would, be made clean. The chapter closes with an infinitely v. 27. pathetic question: *Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! thou wilt not be made clean; how long shall it yet be?* —or rather, "How long shall it yet be before thou art made clean?"

An Application

"After how long yet?" In a sermon on this text, Dr. David Roberts, author of *A Letter from*

Heaven, and other Sermons, remarks that the question is as applicable to-day to many hearers of the Gospel as it was in Jeremiah's day to the people of Jerusalem. The questioning entreaty has in it the sound (1) of Promises often given, and as often broken; (2) of Vows repeatedly vowed, but all of them unpaid; (3) of Divine Expectancy still unfulfilled (4) of Divine Patience almost exhausted. Each delay makes it harder to yield. Those who have surrendered, cry with one voice "Make haste!" The voice of the lost joins in awful warning—"Make no delay!" Jer. xiii. 1–27.

A Supplication

Most Holy God, such as are in Thy service often mourn in secret places that they do not serve Thee far better. If we are something to Thee for Thy people, how much more Thine we could be! If we are something to Thee for a name, for a praise, for a glory, how much more honour we could add to Thy name, how much more clearly show forth Thy praise, how much more faithfully we might reflect Thy glory! There are spots on our soul; Lord, cleanse us, make us white as snow. Sanctify Thy Church universal, that she may even now give an earnest of her perfect estate when she shall stand before Thee in all her glory, with never a spot or wrinkle or any such flaw. Amen. v. 11.

XIII

THE BOUNDARIES OF INTERCESSION

The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah concerning the dearth. Judah mourneth, and the gates thereof languish; they are black unto the ground; and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up. And their nobles have sent their little ones to the waters: they came to the pits, *and* found no water; they returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded, and covered their heads. Because the ground is chapt, for there was no rain in the earth, the ploughmen were ashamed, they covered their heads. Yea, the hind also calved in the field, and forsook *it*, because there was no grass. And the wild asses did stand in the high places, they snuffed up the wind like dragons; their eyes did fail, because *there was* no grass. O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, do thou *it* for thy name's sake: for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against thee. O the hope of Israel, the saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man *that* turneth aside to tarry for a night? Why shouldest thou be as a man astonied, as a mighty man *that* cannot save? yet thou, O LORD, *art* in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name; leave us not. Thus saith the LORD unto this people, Thus have they loved to wander, they have not refrained their feet, therefore the LORD doth not accept them; he will now remember their iniquity, and visit their sins. Then said the LORD unto me, Pray not for this people for *their* good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt-offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence. Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, the prophets say unto them, Ye shall not

see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place. Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that prophesy in my name, and I sent them not, yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land; By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed. And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and they shall have none to bury them, them, their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters: for I will pour their wickedness upon them. Therefore thou shalt say this word unto them: Let mine eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease: for the virgin daughter of my people is broken with a great breach, with a very grievous blow. If I go forth into the field, then behold the slain with the sword! and if I enter into the city, then behold them that are sick with famine! yea, both the prophet and the priest go about into a land that they know not. Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? hath thy soul loathed Zion? why hast thou smitten us, and *there is* no healing for us? we looked for peace, and *there is* no good; and for the time of healing, and behold trouble! We acknowledge, O LORD, our wickedness, *and* the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned against thee. Do not abhor *us*, for thy name's sake, do not disgrace the throne of thy glory: remember, break not thy covenant with us. Are there *any* among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? *art* not thou he, O LORD our God? therefore we will wait upon thee: for thou hast made all these *things*. . . . Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, *yet* my mind *could* not *be* toward this people: cast *them* out of my sight, and let them go forth. . . . For who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem? or who shall bemoan thee? or who shall go aside to ask how thou doest? Thou hast forsaken me, saith the LORD, thou art gone backward; therefore will I stretch out my hand against thee, and destroy thee; I am weary with repenting. And I will fan them with a fan in the gates of the land. . . . Their widows are increased to me above the sand of the seas.—JER. XIV. 1–22; XV. 1, 5–8.

Jer. xiv. 1–22 ; xv. 1, 5–8.

A Time of Drought.

In this chapter the Prophet identifies himself altogether with his people in their affliction during a period of terrible drought. The pictures are sharply concrete, and suggest a sea of woe. The hind forgets her maternal instinct and forsakes her young, *because there is no grass.* The wild asses on the bare heights pant for air, with eyes that fail, seeing no herbage. The nobles—the last likely to suffer—send their menials to the pits, only to find them waterless ; they return, ashamed and confounded, their vessels all empty. Jeremiah, speaking for himself and the faithful remnant, confesses the iniquities, the many backslidings, which had made the nation deserving of all it suffered. But God had His name to guard : *work Thou for Thy name's sake, O Lord.* The punishment of man must be measured, not by man's disloyalty, but by the honour of the Name. *O Thou Hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble*—the last resort, when all else has failed ! It is trust touched with profound humility, as though he said : " even if we have only turned to Thee for hope, when all other hopes have deceived us ; even if we forget Thee when all goes well, and only remember Thee as Saviour when trouble and disaster threaten to overwhelm us ; still, have regard to Thy Name—Thy lovingkindness must mean more to Thee than anything we can pay in suffering penalty for our wrongdoing. After all, Thou *art* hope, Thou *art* Saviour : we may deny Thee, Thou wilt not deny Thyself."

v. 5.

v. 3.

v. 7.

v. 8.

God's Wayfaring.

Why shouldest Thou be as a sojourner in the land ?

We know the answer; Jeremiah knew it too. God is never a stranger except to those who have made Him a stranger. The beginning of the estrangement is never on God's part. Where Christ knocks, He has been deliberately kept out: He who should have been the Best-beloved of guests is an outcast and a suppliant at the door; and if no one hear His voice, He will have to go away. Jer. xiv. 1–22; xv. 1, 5–8.

As a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for the night [that spreadeth his tent, R.V. margin]. In such a case, there is no intimacy, no mutual interchange of secrets. The stranger does not enter into the private sorrows or joys of the household; and they do not discover what his special business may be. There may be a few offices of courtesy, but no more. At eventide the tent is spread out: the way it is done makes it clear that it is only for a night; with the advent of morning, tent and traveller disappear. Is Jeremiah—walking, perhaps, better than he knew—approaching the great truth of the Incarnation? The Eternal Word has "dwelt among us"—set His tabernacle in the midst of us, not for a night, but always. And that light must have dawned on Jeremiah's agonising soul, when he so pleaded. *Why shouldest thou be as a man astonied, as a mighty man that cannot save?* Is it not a Saviour's business to save? In spite of Jerusalem's unfaithfulness, *yet Thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by Thy name: leave us not.* Clearly, this is not the nation's cry and pleading; but we can conceive of Jeremiah with a few kindred souls meeting for prayer, and so

Towards a Great Light.

v. 9.

Jer. xiv. 1–22 ; xv. 1, 5–8.

praying and wrestling with God in their prayer. In such a fellowship of intercession hope would revive ; but alas ! only for a short while. Whether it was the personal and private intercession of the Prophet, or the intercession of some such elect group, to pass from its atmosphere to the streets and meet the crowds of Jerusalem was to face the sirocco, scorching wind of the desert. Every street

Reaction.

flaunted still its altar " to the shameful thing " ; religious rites were the more favoured the more

v. 10.

they bordered on impurity : *even so have they loved to wander ; they have not refrained their feet.* He felt once more as if prayer were slain within his

v. 11.

soul : *And the Lord said unto me, Pray not for this people for their good.* But he still made an effort to plead for them, by alleging that the prophets had misled them, and fed them with false forecasts, promising them, in God's name, *assured peace.*

v. 13.

These prophets God once and again disowned, and at the same time proclaimed their doom—to be consumed by the sword and the famine which they affirmed would never come. And it shall be the doom of the people also : the Prophet must not let his tears dim the clear solemn message : rather let him be eyes for them, to see the *great breach,* the

. 17.

very grievous wound. So the picture stands up

v. 18.

before him and them in its inexorable realism : *If I go forth into the field, then behold the slain with the sword ! if I enter into the city, then behold them that are sick with famine !* Prophet and priest, where are they ? If they have at all survived, they go about in a strange land, begging for bread !

It is a woeful message—a dirge of calamity, unrelieved at the moment by any ray of hope. It is their own wickedness being " poured " upon them. But the Prophet cannot remain standing outside the circle of their punishment and desolation: he himself is afflicted with their afflictions, hurt with their hurt; there can be for him, when the hour of doom strikes, no wayfarer's khan in the wilderness (ix. 2), protected because of its separateness, secure from ill through its lonely faroffness. He must be with them, and of them, bearing more than his share of their adversity—as every pure, sensitive soul must. *Let mine eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease; for the virgin daughter of my people is broken with a great breach, with a very grievous wound.*

Jer. xiv. 1–22; xv. 1, 5–8. v. 16. viii. 21. v. 17.

A beautiful penitential psalm follows, bathed still with his tears. It is his own, but meant for the nation; he would teach them to repeat it after him, till it became a daily part of their private and public devotions. *Hast Thou utterly rejected Judah? hath Thy soul loathed Zion? why hast Thou smitten us, and there is no healing for us?* If God rejects what He had once chosen, if He loathes what He once cherished, the cause of it must be sufficient to satisfy the righteousness glowing in the Father's perfect love. Therefore let the erring children weigh their errors in honest balances, and confess them without any excusing reserve. This is the pattern of prayer for a nation repenting—*We acknowledge, O Lord, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned against*

vv. 19–22. Prayer survives.

Jer. xiv. 1–22 ; xv. 1, 5–8.

Thee. In this the generations seem to kneel together: yesterday and to-day lift up their moaning in unison to Heaven. But the merit is not in our tears for the past and the present: the gracious reply must come from the God of all grace.

> Could my zeal no respite know,
> Could my tears for ever flow,
> All for sin could not atone—
> Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Do not abhor us, for Thy name's sake; do not disgrace the throne of Thy glory: remember, break not Thy covenant with us. A profound sense of sin as an abhorrence to the Holy God—an equally sublime sense of the unsullied sheen of God's throne—an unshaken trust in God's fidelity to His word: these are the sure foundation of all true and great intercession. There are no longer any gods but God: *they* are but the "vanities," the empty lies, of the heathen! How could these dead stocks guide the merciful clouds and give refreshing showers when the drought has smitten the land as with the greyness of death? The starry hosts, including the queen of heaven herself, can they cause it to rain when the sky is as brass? *Art not Thou He, O Lord our God?*—Giver of dew and showers, Guide of clouds and of "lightning for the rain."

v. 22.

Chap. XV. Arrest of Prayer.

Such intercession will surely prevail? Without a doubt, if the people join with the Prophet. But he was alone, his prayer only a monologue: there was no congregational litany. They made no confession, they did not even feel their sin to be a

horror in the sight of God; they went on with their idolatries and cherished the "shameful thing." On their part they broke the covenant every day, though they still impiously expected Him to observe His part of it. *Then said the Lord unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth.* This solemn teaching of the limitations of intercession appears once and again in Jeremiah's memorabilia—mostly in his own experience of having his prayers stopped (vii. 16; xi. 14; xiv. 11). Salvation and intercession have the same boundaries: neither can infringe on the inherent rights of the human will. Whatever large spaces of hope there may be in such terms as "common salvation" (Jude 3), "eternal salvation" (Heb. v. 9), "able to save to the uttermost" (Heb. vii. 25), the consent of the human will, expressed or understood, must be kept inviolable. No prayer for either man or nation can avail, when there is no inclination whatever on the part of the defendant to second it—nay, even to acknowledge its need. A soul thrust into the heaven of heavens against its will—if such a thing were conceivable—would be still unsaved. "There is a sin unto death"—which has crossed the last frontier of human prayer: but it does not mean some particular form of sin, but the whole attitude and habit of the soul. To pray for the cure of a man who refuses every wise counsel of health is clearly to pray in vain. True, as Bishop Westcott remarks, prayer is not forbidden. "St. John does

Jer. xiv. 1–22; xv. 1, 5–8.

1 John v. 16.

Jer. xiv. 1–22 ; xv. 1, 5–8.

not command intercession when the sin is seen, recognised by the brother, in its fatal intensity ; but, on the other hand, he does not expressly exclude it. Even if the tenour of his words may seem to dissuade such prayer, it is because the offender lies without the Christian Body, excluded from its life yet not beyond the creative, vivifying power of God."

Mercy will recall Prayer.

When prayer is silenced and judgement marches in its might, mercy still keeps watch for any chance of being permitted, through any sign of penitence, to render help. The pathetic cry comes in the midst of the tumult and dusk of advancing doom :

vv. 5, 6.

Who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem ? or who shall bemoan thee ? or who shall turn aside to ask of thy welfare ? The Judge Himself is most concerned to find an advocate, although He has been disappointed, time after time, in her promises of reform : *Thou hast rejected Me, saith the Lord, thou art gone backward : therefore have I stretched out My hand against thee, and destroyed thee ; I am weary with repenting.* God condescends to borrow our human speech, to show how His mercy strives with our sin ; how He postpones His judgement in order

Luke xiii. 6–9.

to provide opportunities for repentance ; how the obstinacy of men tires out His longsuffering. The Prophet sees the end of mercy's day, and the coming on of the black night of disaster and death. The

vv. 7–9.

people taken to *the gates of the land* are " fanned " with the wind of judgement and blown like chaff into captivity (cp. Ps. i. 4). War-widows increase *above the sand of the seas ;* the mother of seven

children, in whom her mother's pride found perpetual joy (Ps. cxxvii. 3–5), now from her larger family derives nought but larger sorrow: *her sun is gone down while it was yet day.* Jer. xiv. 1–22; xv. 1, 5–8.

So the Prophet pleaded with the people then—and with us all to-day—warning them that "they are not shut up, except indeed by their own evil will, in unbelief and hardness of heart, that it is they only themselves who make inevitable their doom."

An Application

A drought helps to prolong itself. As the earth grows harder, and the heights drier, there is less power to attract the cloud and win the shower. The dry earth and the dry air conspire together to consume the last residue of moisture. A season of spiritual drought in the same way tends to lengthen its stay. When there is no freshness in our soul, we cannot find freshness in the gospel of grace. Our dryness dries up the dew of the Spirit. We should pray for passing showers, even if we may not be ready for the great rains of His strength. It may be some earnest soul, lifting itself Godward like a solitary peak, shall, like Elijah, attract "a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand," a token of abundance of rain. For the sea from which the little cloud rises, is deep as the mercy of God.

A Supplication

Lord, we know that our iniquities testify against us. They have much evidence to put forward, and

Jer. xiv. 1–22 ; xv. 1, 5–8.

very strong evidence. But we have an Advocate Who has won the case for millions of guilty souls. For Thy Name's sake, when our iniquities shout against us, hear how He pleads ; and when He lifts up His hand for us, behold, it is wounded. There is more joy for Thee in remembering what He suffered for love's sake, than in remembering our sins. Blot out our transgression, that the glory of His Cross may shine with more and more splendour. Amen.

XIV

PERSONAL DISCIPLINE

Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife, and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me. . . . O LORD, thou knowest: remember me, and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors; take me not away in thy longsuffering: know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke. Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts. I sat not in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced; I sat alone because of thy hand: for thou hast filled me with indignation. Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, *which* refuseth to be healed? wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, *and as* waters *that* fail? Therefore thus saith the LORD, If thou return, then will I bring thee again, *and* thou shalt stand before me: and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth: let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them. And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brasen wall: and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I *am* with thee to save thee and to deliver thee, saith the LORD. And I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible. The word of the LORD came also unto me, saying, Thou shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons or daughters in this place. For thus saith the LORD concerning the sons and concerning the daughters that are born in this place, and concerning their mothers that bare them, and concerning their fathers that begat them in this land; They shall die of grievous deaths; they shall not be lamented; neither shall they be buried; *but*

they shall be as dung upon the face of the earth ; and they shall be consumed by the sword, and by famine ; and their carcases shall be meat for the fowls of heaven, and for the beasts of the earth. For thus saith the LORD, Enter not into the house of mourning, neither go to lament nor bemoan them : for I have taken away my peace from this people, saith the LORD, *even* lovingkindness and mercies. Both the great and the small shall die in this land : they shall not be buried, neither shall *men* lament for them, nor cut themselves, nor make themselves bald for them : neither shall *men* tear *themselves* for them in mourning, to comfort them for the dead ; neither shall *men* give them the cup of consolation to drink for their father or for their mother. Thou shalt not also go into the house of feasting, to sit with them to eat and to drink. For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel ; Behold, I will cause to cease out of this place in your eyes, and in your days, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride. And it shall come to pass, when thou shalt shew this people all these words, and they shall say unto thee, Wherefore hath the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us ? or what *is* our iniquity ? or what *is* our sin that we have committed against the LORD our God ? Then shalt thou say unto them, Because your fathers have forsaken me, saith the LORD, and have walked after other gods, and have served them, and have worshipped them, and have forsaken me, and have not kept my law ; and ye have done worse than your fathers ; for, behold, ye walk every one after the imagination of his evil heart, that they may not hearken unto me : Therefore will I cast you out of this land into a land that ye know not, *neither* ye nor your fathers ; and there shall ye serve other gods day and night ; where I will not shew you favour. Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be said, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt ; but, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them : and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers. Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the LORD, and they shall fish them ; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks. . . . O LORD, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto

thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and *things* wherein *there is* no profit. —JER. xv. 10, 15–21; xvi. 1–16, 19.

IN a series of dolorous lyrics, intensely human, the prophet gives expression to his personal experience—struggling, questioning, denouncing, appealing, in all the moods of a great poet—but always sorrowing. He is in the depths of lonely despondency when he cries out: *Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth!* What a burden for any man's soul to bear—with no companion to share its weight, no friendly voice to console him in seasons of apparent defeat, when his prophetic warnings only fulfilled themselves in national disaster. His one refuge was a genuine consciousness of honesty, in conduct and mission. He protested that he was neither usurer nor fraudulent debtor: *yet every one of them doth curse me.* He found strength in God: but there were hours of gloom when he felt as if God would not have him—as though He had covered Himself with a cloud and prayer could not pass through.

Jer. xv. 10, 15–21; xvi. 1–16, 19.

Chap. XV. v. 10. "O Lord, Thou knowest."

Lam. iii. 44.

In a better, more self-comforting mood, he can say, *O Lord, Thou knowest.* When the assailed servant of God can sincerely lay open his heart in his Master's sight, he already tastes comfort which no opposition or hostility can take away: he sustains himself on the hidden manna. To suffer reproach for God's sake is to win the greater reward. "But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither

v. 15.

1 Pet. iii. 14.

Jer. xv. 10, 15–21 ; xvi. 1–16, 19.

be troubled." Jeremiah had this reward in his own conscience: if he had to speak truth that stirred hatred in the hearts of his audience, as long as he felt sure it was God's message, he enjoyed an inward peace that could indeed be ruffled in dark

v. 16.

hours, but never destroyed. *Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy words were unto me a joy and the rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by Thy name, O Lord God of hosts.* If only such an experience would become permanent! But to him as other prophets, the eating of God's words gave both a sweet and a bitter taste. To Ezekiel the

Ezek. iii. 3.

roll, though in it were written "lamentations, and mourning, and woe," was in his mouth "as honey for sweetness." John tasted also the sweetness of it in his mouth, but the bitterness of it when

Rev. x. 10.

he had eaten. The sweetness is in the consciousness of being called by God's name, in being made His confidant, in the revelation of His nature which He vouchsafes to those "whom He whispers in the ear": the bitterness is in the solemn, stern contents of the message.

Jeremiah swiftly passed from happy to despondent

v. 17.

mood again. His "golden hours," as Bunyan's Pilgrim found, came all too rarely and passed all too soon. He felt anew his forced aloofness, his bleak loneliness: *I sat not in the assembly of those that make merry, nor rejoiced: I sat alone because of Thy hand.* In this case the Hand is authoritative, too strong for man to withstand, without forfeiting

Disowned of God?

his divine commission (Isa. viii. 11). Jeremiah yielded to "the strength of the hand," like Isaiah;

but he felt wounded and sick at heart. *Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? wilt Thou indeed be unto me as a deceitful brook, as waters that fail?* He pictures himself as a traveller in the desert, weary and athirst, imagining a flowing brook in the distance and turning aside from the usual route to find after much labour a dry watercourse—as in the graphic and fuller description of Job (vi. 15–20), where the travellers are shown at the end of their disappointed search "confounded because they had hoped." Was he too, who had been happy in being called by the name of the Lord God of hosts, to be at the last overwhelmed in confusion and shame, his trust in God betrayed?

Jer. xv. 10, 15–21; xvi. 1–16, 19. v. 18.

The first words in God's reply contains a note of chastisement: *If thou return, then will I bring thee again that thou mayest stand before Me.* "If *thou*"—he himself had been affected by the atmosphere of unbelief, as a missionary is in peril of having his early ideals sullied in the midst of heathen immoralities, or a preacher his fervour dulled and his faith weakened in ministering to a worldly congregation. He must be the first to return whole-heartedly to a pure trust in God and unflinching devotion to His truth. He must mourn over his own hesitations, and abstain from impatient complainings. As has been rightly said—"As many as are set on fire by the torch of love, weep over other men's sins as if they were their own. Yet no one worthily deplores the sins of others, who by voluntary falls neglects his own. We must at least cease to sin

vv. 19–21.

God improves His Instrument.

Jer. xv. 10, 15–21 ; xvi. 1–16, 19.

wilfully if we desire to mourn over the falls of others." Such are the sovereign claims of God's higher service; Jeremiah perceived and acknowledged them.

v. 19.

If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as My mouth. There is a cheap way (the proper meaning here of " vile ") and a costly way of doing God's work; and every teacher is tempted often to do it cheaply. There are lessons and sermons, pleasant and shallow—shallow not so much for want of intellectual energy, as for want of moral earnestness—and these fawningly invite themselves to be used. The preacher should diligently burn what is only common or cheap material, and endeavour to give only the precious residue.

Prove thou thy words, the thoughts control
That o'er thee swell and throng;
They will condense within thy soul
And change to purpose strong.

But he who lets his feelings run
In soft luxurious flow,
Shrinks when hard service must be done,
And faints at every woe.

Faith's meanest deed more favour bears,
Where hearts and wills are weighed,
Than brightest transports, choicest prayers,
Which bloom their hour and fade.

Francis of Assisi made his own application of this phrase. When he had preached in Rieti, in the Piazza, the Bishop of the city acknowledging

God for His goodness in illumining "this poor and despised and unlettered man Francis," called upon the people to love and worship the Lord—"and take heed that ye sin not, for not on such wise dealeth He with every nation." Francis, bowing before him and falling at his feet, said, "In truth I say unto you, my Lord Bishop, that no man hath ever done me so great honour in this world as have you this day. For others say, 'This is a holy man,' attributing the glory and the holiness to me, and not to the Creator; but you, as he that is discreet, have separated the precious from the vile." Jer. xv. 10, 15–21; xvi. 1–16, 19.

The Prophet must not be afraid of truth in its most valuable form; though in that form it might often be the least popular (cp. John x. 30–33). He must not modify his message in order to gain the people's favour: *they shall return unto thee, but thou shalt not return unto them.* Let any one put himself in Jeremiah's place—any minister of a congregation or leader of a party—and he will understand how hard was that saying. But a great promise accompanies it—*I am with thee to save thee.* God never gives His faithful servants great and difficult tasks, without great sufficient grace. "And who is sufficient for these things? . . . Our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor. ii. 16; iii. 5). "With a great Price." v. 19. v. 20.

The Prophet's discipline became still more austere. God charged him not to marry. "Jeremiah," says Dr. Peake, "whose heart was so exquisitely fitted for love, and to whom a home would have been a welcome refuge from the scorn and cruelty of his fellows, was doomed to a life of loneliness uncheered Chap. XVI.

Jer. xv. 10, 15–21 ; xvi. 1–16, 19.

by wife or children" (Introd., p. 15). But the ground of the Divine veto is not ascetic discipline : but because if he married and had children they would be doomed to "die of grievous deaths" (xvi. 4) with the children of all other families in Jerusalem—unlamented, unburied. In the words of St. Paul—"I think therefore that this is good by reason of the present distress, namely, that it is good for a man to be as he is" (1 Cor. vii. 26–31). Even ordinary social relaxations were forbidden to him : *And thou shalt not go into the house of feasting to sit with them, to eat and to drink.* He was to keep the moral glow of his soul undimmed, by daily self-denial on lonely paths, ever faithfully reminding his contemporaries of the disloyalty of their fathers to God, and of their own aggravated disloyalty—*ye walk every one after the stubbornness of his evil heart.*

v. 8.

v. 12.

vv. 14–18.

Nevertheless God's bias towards mercy and pardon will manifest itself in darkest judgements. Israel is to be scattered, but Israel is also to be gathered again. A new scripture will be added to the nation's history, and the deliverance from Egypt will be eclipsed by the deliverance from Babylon—*from the land of the north, and from all the countries whither He had driven them.* God will have His fishers and His hunters, lest any should be left forsaken and forgotten, even in "the holes of the rocks." First, recompense for "their iniquity and their sin double" ; then, for their repentance, restoration.

vv. 19–21. The Missionary's Warrant.

Out of all this clash of woe and hope, of comfort and terror, a wonderful prayer is born. *O Lord, my Strength, and my Strong Hold, and my Refuge in the*

day of affliction, unto Thee shall the nations come from the ends of the earth. This is the missionary apologetic of all time. Only they that have *found* God have the call and the power to give Him to all nations. In the phrase of verse 16, the hunters are to find room with the rescued in the Kingdom of Divine Grace; Gentile and Hebrew have but one Father. And to-day we know, with clearer knowledge of all the world-religions, that the whole body of humanity has but one Saviour, Jesus Christ the righteous—Who "is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world" (1 John ii. 2). He is not altogether "ours" till we see that He is "also" for the whole world, and so desire and strive to give Him "to every creature." Jer. xv. 10, 15–21; xvi. 1–16, 19.

An Application

Like the sun, through a break in the heavy driven clouds, suddenly gladdening sky and earth, so at times a bright promise shines out of the Prophet's darkest woe. In the A.V. the latter portion of xv. 11 reads: "Verily I will cause the enemy to entreat thee well in the time of evil, and in the time of affliction." And yet in the previous verse he was bewailing his lot—*Woe is me, my mother!*—that he had been born a man of strife, cursed all round. Bunyan, with his curious skill for finding comfort in out-of-the-way texts, was greatly consoled by this verse, when he had been torn from his home, and especially from his blind child, and shut in Bedford gaol. "That which helped me in this

Jer. xv. 10, 15–21; xvi. 1–16, 19.

temptation was diverse considerations, of which . . . the first was the consideration of these two scriptures, *Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widows trust in Me* (Jer. xlix. 11): and again, *The Lord said, Verily it shall be well with thy remnant; verily I will cause,* etc." (xv. 11).

A Supplication

Lord most merciful, should we have to sit alone because of Thy hand, let Thy presence lighten our solitude. We cannot suffer loss, though we be little in the sight of men, if we are much to Thee. It will help us to return wholly unto Thee. How can we call upon others to turn to Thee, if we ourselves have not returned with all our heart? If they hear us call from close beside Thee, shall not Thy Spirit work in them more mightily? Grant us the joy and strength of knowing, when we are alone with Thee, that we are touching the fringe of the general assembly and Church of the firstborn. Amen.

XV

HEART-SEARCHINGS

The sin of Judah *is* written with a pen of iron, *and* with the point of a diamond: *it is* graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars; whilst their children remember their altars and their groves by the green trees upon the high hills. O my mountain in the field, I will give thy substance *and* all thy treasures to the spoil, *and* thy high places for sin, throughout all thy borders. . . . The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, *I* try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, *and* according to the fruit of his doings. *As* the partridge sitteth *on eggs*, and hatcheth *them* not; *so* he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool. A glorious high throne from the beginning *is* the place of our sanctuary. O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, *and* they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters. Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou *art* my praise. Behold, they say unto me, Where *is* the word of the LORD? let it come now. As for me, I have not hastened from *being* a pastor to follow thee: neither have I desired the woeful day; thou knowest: that which came out of my lips was *right* before thee. . . . Thus saith the LORD unto me; Go and stand in the gate of the children of the people, whereby the kings of Judah come in, and by the which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem; and say unto them, Hear ye the word of the LORD, ye kings of Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that enter in by these gates: Thus saith the LORD; Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the sabbath day, nor bring *it* in by the gates of Jerusalem; neither carry forth a burden out of

your houses on the sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers. But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction. And it shall come to pass, if ye diligently hearken unto me, saith the LORD, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but hallow the sabbath day, to do no work therein; then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: and this city shall remain for ever. And they shall come from the cities of Judah, and from the places about Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the plain, and from the mountains, and from the south, bringing burnt offerings, and sacrifices, and meat offerings, and incense, and bringing sacrifices of praise, unto the house of the LORD. But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.—JER. XVII. 1–3, 9–16, 19–27.

Jer. xvii. 1–3, 9–16, 19–27.

A Dark Inscription.

The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond. The iron stylus and the diamond point were used to cut inscriptions on very hard materials; when so inscribed, the record would permanently stand the test of time. So, the prophet affirmed, is the guilt of sin written on man's heart; and with this the latest word in psychological research agrees. Whether it be a scratch of the pen, as it were, or a deep indenture, it remains. Hidden fault or presumptuous sin, both are indelible; nothing but the grace of God can erase them. The heart of Judah was *hard;* but on that hard table the pen of God's law graves the record, and the hardness will help to secure its permanence. The record is on the horns of their altars as well:

altars devoted to heathen rites, and idolatrous pillars—Asherim—by the green trees, keep and publish the story of their shame to their children. How can such a people be suffered to dwell in God's promised land? *O My mountain in the field, I will give thy substance and all thy treasures for a spoil.*

Jer. xvii. 1–3, 9–16, 19–27.

v. 3.

The human heart is not only prone to hardening, but thoroughly false—*The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is desperately sick: who can know it?* What heart? where had the Prophet made this discovery? It has been suggested that the prophet, in one of those divine moments of moral illumination, had discovered his own heart. The earnest introspection of all the choir of the saintly leads to the same discovery. "For whether he consider his own or his neighbour's estate," says Thomas à Kempis, "he knoweth that none liveth here without tribulation. And the more narrowly a man looks into himself, so much the more he sorroweth. Our sins and wickednesses wherein we lie so enwrapt, that we can seldom apply ourselves to heavenly contemplations, do minister unto us matter of just sorrow and inward compunction."

v. 9.

Disease of the Heart.

"Deceitful"—"desperately sick": and therefore it pretends not to be sick. So, in the time of our Lord Jesus Christ, many of His hearers pretended to be too well to need His healing: they were whole, and needed no physician. Even when the heart gives up pretending, and knows itself to be sick, it seeks health everywhere in preference to coming to the Good Physician. All its deceit must go, before all its sickness can be cured. Then the

John ix. 41.

Jer. xvii. 1–3, 9–16, 19–27.

prayer is sincere, with no vain excuse to hamper its upward flight—*Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed.*

v. 14.

vv. 10–13. There is a Physician.

Who can know it? I the Lord search the heart. The sick human heart is open to His glance; all its maladies are within His ken. All its hidden nooks and twilight caves and darkest depths are clear to His eye. He will give to every man *according to the fruit of his doings.* He will neither punish nor reward unfairly: He knows the root as well as the fruit, and judges with perfect understanding of all that is in man, of all that man is.

v. 11.

Is the man who gathers riches, abundantly but treacherously, safe? By no means. The partridge which "takes possession of another bird's nest and hatches the eggs she finds in it, is afterwards deserted by the alien brood; so the rich man will lose the wealth he has unlawfully acquired." His heart deceived *him;* but he cannot deceive God: *all that forsake Thee shall be ashamed.* In contrast with the permanence of the diamond's lettering on lasting stone, *they that depart from Me shall be written in the earth*—in mere dust which a passing foot or a casual gust may obliterate. They are the victims of their own deceit.

Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved; for Thou art my praise. This prayer naturally joins itself to the shock caused by the opening up of the dark depths of the heart. In watching and denouncing the nation's wrong-doings, the Prophet had found himself, and felt that terror of himself which comes to the fully awakened

soul. But he also found God the Healer, Who makes our healing His praise. As Augustine would stand by him to share his shame and sorrow over the discovered deceit of his heart, so does he turn with him to God's all-healing mercy: "The house of my soul is narrow; O enlarge it that thou mayest enter in. It is ruinous, O repair it. It displeases Thy sight; I confess it, I know. But who shall cleanse it, or unto whom shall I cry but unto Thee? Cleanse me from my secret faults, O Lord, and spare Thy servant from strange sins. . . . Have I not confessed unto Thee mine own sins to my own confusion, O my God, and Thou hast forgiven the impiety of my heart? I strive not in judgement with Thee Who art truth: and I will not deceive myself, lest my iniquity should lie unto itself." And Charles Wesley, leading the singing hosts of saintly souls, stands by the side of Jeremiah and Augustine:

Jer. xvii. 1–3, 9–16, 19–27.

> Just and holy is Thy Name,
> I am all unrighteousness;
> False, and full of sin I am,
> Thou art full of truth and grace.

The Prophet had need of the healed heart, for while his soul was still at prayer he could hear the mocking of hard and hardening Judah: *Behold, they say unto me, Where is the word of the Lord? let it come now.* Of all things hard to bear, nothing is harder for the earnest preacher than cold, keen cynicism. They made a jest of their own doom: they laughed at judgement delayed, and felt sure it

vv. 15–18. God's Time is not Ours.

Jer. xvii. 1–3, 9–16, 19–27.

would never come. In his sorrow he turns again to his great Physician. He pleads with God, in words exquisitely human, that he was God's own shepherd to the people: he had not sought the office, nor did he relish as a sweet morsel the terrible message which he had to proclaim and repeat, he

xv. 18.

was only striving to be loyal to the Lord's dictated truth, at all costs: *neither have I desired the woeful day* [the judgement day of man, R.V. margin]; *Thou knowest: that which came out of my lips was before Thy face.* What a heart's cry! *Thou knowest:* the final appeal of all great prophets in the hour of their apparent discredit (2 Cor. ii. 17; 1 John iii. 21). When he affirmed—*Neither have I desired the woeful day,* he uttered a veiled, needful warning. The preacher—or author—who feels called to denounce his age and predict approaching judgement may at last lose the note of mercy, like Jonah (iv. 2), and be more anxious for the credit of his word than for the wonder of Divine compassion to be gloriously manifested.

Keep the Sabbath holy.

vv. 19–27.

The Prophet introduces a fresh message, on the keeping of the Sabbath. He was commanded to proclaim it in every gate of Jerusalem, that they were neither to bring in nor carry out any burden through the gates, or do any work, on the Sabbath, but hallow the day according to the Law. A promise was linked to the observance of the commandment, of prosperity and permanence, for the throne and the people. The true hallowing of the day would bear fruit in a widespread revival; the country people would crowd into Jerusalem with

festival joy, bringing offerings and sacrifices unto the house of the Lord. On the other hand, if they disobeyed, and desecrated the Sabbath, the fire of judgement would start at the gates and devour the palaces, and leave one vast ruin. **Jer. xvii. 1–3, 9–16, 19–27.**

The message is as timely to-day as it was in Jeremiah's day. When classes of people of all degrees conspire more and more audaciously to abuse the Lord's Day, when freedom is perverted into licence, and drink and play take the place of prayer and Christian communion, it works straight for weariness and discontent and strife, for physical and moral degeneracy. The Sabbath was meant for a merciful boon, to bring our earthly life under the benignant sway of a redeemed spirit-life; and so grow strong as week by week they provide

> Eternity in time; the steps by which
> We climb above all ages; lamps that light
> Man through his heap of dark days; and the rich
> And full redemption of the whole week's flight.

Let men scheme and plot as they will, for profit or for pleasure, an un-Sabbathed land is an unprotected land, with neither roof nor secure wall.

We now return to the well-known double picture in the earlier part of the chapter. The dark picture comes first—dark with the deep tints of a curse: it is of the man that trusts in mere man, the blind that trusts to a blind leader, a reed that trusts in the shelter of a reed. *He shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh:* like some starved shrub in parched places of the wilder- **Desert Heath or Green Tree? vv. 5–8.**

Jer. xvii. 1–3, 9–16, 19–27.

ness, with no receptive leaf for the rains (" he shall not see when good cometh "), and no water beneath the surface for its root to reach. The life that is altogether earthly is just as poverty-stricken: it has no receptive faculty for heaven's " showers of blessing " ; its roots are away from the perennial streams of God's plenteous grace. It is just a stunted desert-shrub, as seen in eternity's light: desolate, parched, doomed. *He shall not see*—he loses the vision, through his earthliness. His heart has departed from the Lord ; and good can come only to those whose faces are toward Him.

But the man that trusts in the Lord furnishes a picture with glowing colours—*blessed:* the very colours of heavenly bliss. *For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out his roots by the river, and shall not fear when heat cometh, but his leaf shall be green ; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.* Such a man is " the planting of the Lord " (Isa. lxi. 3) ; God has found him and brought him near to Himself, into vital unimpeded connection with

ix. 24.

His " lovingkindness, judgement, and righteousness." God's lovingkindness makes a cool shade for him, so that he need not fear when heat cometh ; God's judgement, in the year of drought, turns to be his protection (Ps. cxix. 43) ; God's righteousness

Heb. xii. 11.

in him keeps the leaf green and ripens the heavenly fruit which through grace he bears.

My heart is at the secret source
Of every precious thing.

* * *

I thirst for springs of heavenly life,
And here all day they rise ;
I seek the treasure of Thy love,
And close at hand it lies.

Jer. xvii. 1–3, 9–16, 19–27.

An Application

I have not hastened from being a shepherd after Thee. How many shepherds of the Lord's flock can sincerely say that ? The preacher's ineffectiveness is often in his haste. The charge against the false prophets was that they ran when they were not even sent (xxiii. 21). But even those who are not false may be tempted to hurry before they have listened long and well to the voice of the Spirit. The message of the Cross could be spoilt by undue haste ; therefore the Apostles were bidden to "tarry." When the message is fully received, and the messenger is duly equipped, "endued with power from on high," then the urgency of the King's business may require haste—but never hurry, never shallowness, never impatience, never hastening from being "after" God. "Tarry thou the Lord's leisure" (Ps. xxvii. 16, C.P.).

v. 16.

Luke xxiv. 29.

A Supplication

Most Holy and most Merciful God, when we entreat Thee to search our hearts, give us grace that we may join Thee in the search. Unless Thou art with us, we dare not look into its dark recesses, we dare not open its secret chambers, we dare not pursue its covered pathways—lest we despair. Thy Holy Spirit can throughly cleanse what it

Jer. xvii. 1–3, 9–16, 19–27.

reveals, and take away the shameful things which His light makes clear. And yet we would join Thee when Thou searchest and triest it, that we may learn the deathliness of our sin, and the cost of our cleansing. Thy Son could not have loosed us from our sins unless He had loved us. We trust Thee with our sick heart, O merciful Redeemer! Amen.

XVI

A SERMON FROM THE POTTER'S HOUSE

The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make *it*. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay *is* in the potter's hand, so *are* ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. *At what* instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy *it*; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And *at what* instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant *it*; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them. Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. And they said, There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart. Therefore thus saith the LORD; Ask ye now among the heathen, who hath heard such things: the virgin of Israel hath done a very horrible thing. Will *a man* leave the snow of Lebanon *which cometh* from the rock of the field? *or* shall the cold flowing waters that come from another place be forsaken? Because

my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity, and they have caused them to stumble in their ways *from* the ancient paths, to walk in paths, *in* a way not cast up; to make their land desolate, *and* a perpetual hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished, and wag his head. I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will shew them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity. Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words.—JER. XVIII. 1–18.

Jer. xviii. 1–18.

The Preacher obeys.

THE Lord sent His servant to the potter's house. For God is interested in the industries of men; His own Son spent nearly twenty years in a carpenter's shop. If God is there, honest work and just wages must also be there to honour Him. And as He is interested in the daily handiwork of man, His messengers should also know the potter's house and the potter himself. They must spare time to leave their books at intervals and come close to the lives of toiling men and women. Jeremiah found an immortal sermon, shaped by the potter's wheel:

v. 2. *there I will cause thee to hear My words.* The pulpit should be kept near to where God speaks.

vv. 3, 4. The potter placed the clay on the wheel, and as the wheel revolved, one hand was holding the clay in its place, the other moulding it according to the shape that was in his mind. But the clay did not work out according to the inward design. Perhaps the experienced finger felt it to be rougher or finer than it appeared. In either case, the clay was allowed to fall back on the slackening wheel, a shapeless mass. It was not reckoned as rubbish,

however, and cast contemptuously aside. If it was rougher than he thought, it could be used for a poorer vessel; if finer, for a better. Jer. xviii. 1–18.

When the servant obeys, his Lord helps him to find and apply the sermon: *then the word of the Lord came to me*—" then," when he was submissive, attentive, expectant. *O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord.* The Divine Artist works with material that yields ill or yields well. The will of man, and the will of a nation, each furnishes surprises, glad or sad. God has issued His design *to pluck up and to break down and to destroy* a kingdom: but the people repent and turn from their evil; then God repents, too, of the evil He had *thought to do unto them.* He will mould the clay to a finer vessel. Contrariwise, when He has proclaimed His purpose to build and to plant a kingdom, the people hardening themselves to disobey Him and to do evil in His sight can thwart His design. He will not treat the clay as rubbish, because He is plenteous in mercy, but a poorer vessel will be produced. Greece, Rome, Israel, Spain—not to mention more—prove the darker working of this moral law. But in the realm of Divine grace something more happens than in the potter's house. A new Greece, a new Rome, a new Israel, a new Spain, would again give God the chance of working out a nobler design. The Spirit interprets. vv. 5–10.

The potter would not wish to mar; his bias would be towards beautiful and well-pleasing construction. So is God's will on the side of redemption. He must be just; He loves to be

Jer. xviii. 1–18.

merciful. His Son did not come to our world to destroy, but to save—when it would have been so much easier to destroy it than to save it (cp. 2 Peter iii. 9). When we meditate on the Sovereignty of God, we have nothing to fear: it is not against us, but for us. The Divine Artist is also our Righteous Father. He sees in us more of the child than of the clay.

Isa. lxiv. 8.

v. 11.

New Chance for the Clay.

From the potter's house the Prophet had to take his fresh sermon to *the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.* They were the marred vessel; coarse-grained, stiff to handle—and yet not to be cast aside. Their condition cried to a righteous God to "frame evil" against them—let the Potter use His art in *shaping* a vessel of judgement against them, instead of attempting to shape *them* into moral beauty! But mercy again came forward with its wistful appeal—*Return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.* In the parable from the potter's house man seemed to be nothing but cold, dead, helpless clay, and God, the Sovereign Artist, everything. Here, on the other hand, man seems lifted to high dignity and self-mastery: he is to *make* his ways and doings good. There is no real contradiction, only a change of emphasis. The human and Divine parts are brought together in the classic saying of St. Paul: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

Phil. ii. 12, 13.

v. 12.

The reply to the fervent appeal is like the clank

of a prisoner's iron fetters. *But they say, There is no hope.* The meaning of it was the worst of all: it was not that they *could* not be saved, but they *would* not—*for we will walk after our own devices, and we will do every one after the stubbornness of his evil heart.* They borrow the preacher's language in order to mock him; it is not likely otherwise that they would speak of the stubbornness of their evil hearts.

Jer. xviii. 1–18.

The Clay will not yield.

There follows one of those great outbursts of the Prophet, in which, speaking directly for God, in God's name, he calls the nations as witnesses to "the horrible thing" which Israel has committed in forsaking and forgetting their God. *Shall the snow of Lebanon fail from the rock of the field? or shall the cold waters that flow down from afar be dried up?* The verse is not easy to explain, word for word; but probably the meaning is that the cool fountain in the rock, fed as by the eternal snow on lofty heights, never dries up. Neither shall God, the Fountain of living waters, fail: why therefore should they forsake Him? Changing the figure, they have *stumbled in the ancient paths, to walk in bypaths* (cp. vi. 16). Bypaths seem easier and more pleasant to the unregenerate self: even Christian and Hopeful, far on their journey, were tempted to take the bypath —"here is the easiest going"; and found how hard it was to return to the ancient path. "Then I thought it is easier going out of the way when we are in, than going in when we are out." *They say, There is no hope.* The last and worst insult to God is to say that He cannot save. This is "a sin unto death."

vv. 13–17.

1 John v. 16.

Jer. xviii. 1–18. The end of the preaching and pleading, for the Prophet, was a plot—one of several during his ministry—against his life, and a callous rejection of his message. *Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words.* They found comfort in the sinister thought, that when they had rid themselves of him, the law of the priest, the counsel of the wise, the word of the prophet—all three popular favourites—would stand unchallenged. There could not be another Jeremiah! How could they, blind and unclean, behold a far-off day when Another would stand in the Temple, pleading and sorrowing, despised and rejected, and that many would say "Jeremias has come again" (Matt. xvi. 14)?

v. 18.

Shadows of Martyrdom.

An Application

v. 12. *And they said, There is no hope.* Where man speaks his last word of despair, God utters His word of hope. "Have you nothing left but despair?" asks John Howe. "It is not like a reasonable creature to say *that*, while yet you are on this side hell. . . . But if you are to hope at all, what are you to hope for? Are you to hope that God will save you upon other terms than He hath declared? Are you to hope that He will make a new gospel, to comply with your humour and lustful inclination? That certainly were the maddest hope that ever was taken up by any one. No, all hope you are to have is, that if you have any apprehension of your case, the grieved Spirit may return—the affronted, resisted Spirit—if you

supplicate, as for life, that He would; that He Who carries in Himself all the treasures of light, and life, and grace, would yet come back, and assist and establish His dominion in your soul." Jer. xviii. 1–18.

A Supplication

O Thou wise and patient Teacher of men, save us from making our daily task more dreary by keeping the thought of Thee out of it. Help the mother to find Thee, who art tenderer than a mother, in caring for her children. Help the shepherd to find Thee, who art the Chief Shepherd of all souls, in watching over his wayward sheep. Help the sailor to find Thee, Pilot of all seas, in bringing his ship into the desired haven. Help the toiler, when he looks on his hand made hard by labour, to remember Thee and that his name is graven on the palms of Thy hands. Help the preacher, when he prepares to preach to others, to hear what word Thou hast for him, lest he partake not of the salvation which, in Thy Name, he offers to others. Lord, have mercy upon us all. Amen.

Isa. xlix. 15. 1 Pet. v. 4. Isa. xlix. 16. 1 Cor. ix. 27.

XVII

IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

Thus saith the LORD, Go and get a potter's earthen bottle, and *take* of the ancients of the people, and of the ancients of the priests; and go forth unto the valley of the son of Hinnom, which *is* by the entry of the east gate, and proclaim there the words that I shall tell thee, And say, Hear ye the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem; Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, the which whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle. Because they have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents; They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire *for* burnt-offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake *it*, neither came *it* into my mind: therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that this place shall no more be called Tophet, nor The valley of the son of Hinnom, but The valley of slaughter. And I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place; and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hands of them that seek their lives: and their carcases will I give to be meat for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth. And I will make this city desolate, and an hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished and hiss because of all the plagues thereof. And I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they shall eat every one the flesh of his friend in the siege and straitness, wherewith their enemies, and they that seek their lives, shall straiten them. Then shalt thou break the bottle in

the sight of the men that go with thee, and shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Even so will I break this people and this city, as *one* breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again: and they shall bury *them* in Tophet, till *there be* no place to bury. . . . Now Pashur the son of Immer the priest, who *was* also chief governor in the house of the LORD, heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things. Then Pashur smote Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that *were* in the high gate of Benjamin, which *was* by the house of the LORD. And it came to pass on the morrow, that Pashur brought forth Jeremiah out of the stocks. Then said Jeremiah unto him, The LORD hath not called thy name Pashur, but Magor-missabib. For thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will make thee a terror to thyself, and to all thy friends: and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and thine eyes shall behold *it:* and I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive into Babylon, and shall slay them with the sword. Moreover I will deliver all the strength of this city, and all the labours thereof, and all the precious things thereof, and all the treasures of the kings of Judah will I give into the hand of their enemies, which shall spoil them, and take them, and carry them to Babylon. And thou, Pashur, and all that dwell in thine house shall go into captivity: and thou shalt come to Babylon, and there thou shalt die, and shalt be buried there, thou, and all thy friends, to whom thou hast prophesied lies. O LORD, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me. For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the LORD was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily. Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But *his word* was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not *stay*. For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report, *say they*, and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, *saying*, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him. But the LORD *is* with me as a mighty terrible one: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall not prosper: *their* everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten. But, O LORD of hosts, that triest the righteous, *and* seest the reins and the heart, let me

see thy vengeance on them : for unto thee have I opened my cause. Sing unto the LORD, praise ye the LORD : for he hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evil-doers. Cursed *be* the day wherein I was born ; let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed.—JER. XIX. 1–11 ; XX. 1–13.

Jer. xix. 1–11 ; xx. 1–13.

SURELY this is the valley of the shadow, known of the Psalmist ; or to use the prophet's own memorable phrase, these are *the mountains of twilight* (xiii. 16), where the strongest may stumble, when, looking for light, it is turned into the shadow of death. As to Dante, entering the dark wood, precinct of Hell, there came a sense of utter bitterness—

> So bitter was it, scarcely more is death

—some such experience filled Jeremiah's soul with amazement and lonely woe.

vv. 1–3. The Horror of Moloch.

He bought, by Divine direction, an earthen bottle, and, accompanied by the elders of the people and a number of priests, took it to the Valley of Hinnom, associated as it was with the cruellest and foulest rites of idolatry. Here children had been burnt as sacrifices to Moloch—

> horrid king, besmeared with blood,
> Of human sacrifice, and parents' tears ;
> Though, for the noise of drums and timbrels loud,
> Their children's cries unheard that passed through fire,
> To his grim idol.

What made it more horrible was that they would have it that Jehovah desired and demanded such oblations. Jehovah *was* their Moloch ! How often still must men's conceptions of Him grieve Him !

They have forsaken Me, and have estranged this place —was God's reply, as though they had removed a portion of the Holy Land and made it foreign and heathen. They had filled it with the blood of innocents—*which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into My mind.* So God condescends to lowliest human language to express His abhorrence—as though such a rite and such a misconception had taken Him by surprise. The judgement, fast approaching, will change the name of the place into the "Valley of Slaughter," because of the hosts of the slain, doomed victims of the conquerors' swords. *In the siege and in the straitness*, the people who have burnt their sons in the fire for burnt-offerings shall now eat their children's flesh—their own iniquity recoiling upon them. "Wherewithal a man sinneth, by the same also shall he be punished," wrote the Son of Sirach: "Thou, O God, tormentest men with their own abominations."

Jer. xix. 1–11; xx. 1–13. v. 4. v. 5. v. 9.

To make his words more emphatic the Prophet is bidden break the bottle in the sight of elders and priests, as a vivid sign: *Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again.*

v. 11.

From Tophet he returned to the Temple, and in its court repeated the dread syllables of doom. The chief officer of the Temple—probably "chief of the Temple police"—heard the offensive message, and exercised his power in arresting Jeremiah, but overstepped his authority in smiting him and placing him overnight in the stocks—as Paul

xx. 1–6. Pashur.

Jer. xix. 1–11 ; xx. 1–13.

suffered in a later age (Acts xvi. 37). Pashur himself pretended to be a prophet ; it was therefore all the more galling to him to have such words uttered and repeated by a member of the guild. In the morning when Jeremiah was brought before Pashur, it is not he who receives judgement, but he pronounces it on his judge ; by direction of God he changes his name and calls him " Terror-on-every-Side." He may silence the Prophet's voice ; but he cannot henceforth banish from his soul the fear of doom. His fear will betray itself to others, and so the terror will be spread on every side, like an epidemic—sinister, uncanny, irresistible. *Thou shalt come to Babylon and there thou shalt die, and there shalt thou be buried, thou, and all thy friends, to whom thou hast prophesied falsely.*

If Jeremiah seems too harsh in these proceedings, consider his trials and the dark anguish of his soul. He was hemmed in by secret treacheries and prejudiced hostilities, groping as among death's shadows : lonely, misrepresented, disbelieved, forced to deliver message after message of odious truth, and then unjustly punished—

" Fightings within, and fears without."

Had God betrayed him ?

It was his darkest hour. He felt an outcast from men and God. According to his " private interpretation " of his own prophecies, they were falsified. He had fixed dates prematurely, or drawn conclusions of his own—which were not part of the authentic Divine message—and so felt as if he had been discredited in the eyes of his adversaries and

his audience. *O Lord, Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: Thou art stronger than I and hast prevailed.* God had overcome his early backwardness, and thrust him into the dismal conflict which was to last a lifetime. The very greatness of his soul quickened its sensitiveness; for it is the dullest that is least given to confusion of face. Men of rich endowments of intellect and emotion cannot avoid self-torture, especially when their noblest tasks bring upon them dishonour. "Had I known at first," Luther once said, "before I began to write, what I now know, that people are so hostile to the Word of God, and determined to oppose it, I should certainly have held my tongue. I should never have been so bold as to attack the Pope and almost all men, and incense them against me. I thought that they sinned through ignorance and human frailty. I did not understand that they purposely kept down the Word of God. But God drew me on in my blindness, just as men blind a horse that he may run the better." Luther and Jeremiah are companions in the mood of a dark hour. *I am become a laughing-stock all the day, every one mocketh me.* And yet, if it were put to him, would he now have preferred saying "No" to God? The mood is not the real soul of either Luther or Jeremiah.

Jer. xix. 1–11; xx. 1–13. v. 7. i. 6, 7. v. 7.

He tried it, tried to resign from God's service and failed. *If I say, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name, then there is in mine heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones.* That fire is of Divine kindling: to quench v. 9.

Jer. xix. 1–11 ; xx. 1–13.

it is to impair the soul's nobility, probably to destroy it utterly. The thorn of truth is of more value than the rose of falsehood.

His enemies were not like the secret plotters of his native Anathoth ; they were becoming brazen in their hostility. *For I have heard the defaming of many, terror on every side*—he himself was tasting the bitter cup which he had filled for Pashur. *Denounce, and we will denounce him, say all my familiar friends, they that watch for my halting ; peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him.* His " familiar friends " even !—that was the taste of wormwood, as to the Psalmist : " Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." They watched for his halting—now that he runs with the horsemen : they expected his prophetic downfall. Who knows but he, too, may be enticed into softer paths of compromise and half-truths ?

v. 10.

vv. 3, 4.

Ps. xli. 9.

xii. 5.

v. 7.

The Wormwood and the Gall.

He has a stronger to contend with than either false prophet or disloyal priest—the Strongest of all. He has a controversy with God, like Job. *O Lord, Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived : Thou art stronger than I and hast prevailed.* Valiant for truth he may be in the valley where the very ashes cry to heaven, and even in the court of the Temple where falsehood is popular and protected ; but alone, in such utter human loneliness, as breaks the spirit of the bravest, with God not as companion but as adversary. " So bitter it was "—death could not be more ! A genuine prophet of God

utters truth greater than he knows, larger than he apprehends. The Master makes the harp give forth music vaster than itself. When Jeremiah spoke, he surmised dates of his own, and ways of fulfilment that seemed most likely. But no great prophecy is of such private interpretation (2 Pet. i. 20). Judgement tarried, and his hearers mocked: *I am become a laughing-stock all the day, every one mocketh me.* A soul tortured by truth, who can measure its anguish, its stormy confusion? The word of the Lord is made a reproach to him, and a derision, all the day!—the very word, surely, that should bring purest comfort and noblest honour. The cry, muffled in lonely anguish, rises from unsounded depths—*Thou hast deceived me!*

Jer. xix. 1–11; xx. 1–13.

Then let him take refuge in sealed silence. Let him wend his way to his once longed-for lodge in the wilderness, and hide himself. He cannot: he is God's captive. *If I say, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name, then there is in mine heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain.* If one could whisper in his ear—Better that fire and its torment, than sloth of soul, smooth messages to win popular favour for the space of a passing hour. The comradeship and service of truth may be costly, but its rewards are divine. Because of that burning fire which he could not contain, Jeremiah kindled a lamp in the temple of Truth which still shines with undimmed flame. He lost the praise of his age, and gained the regard of the ages. He lost the ear of Jerusalem, and gained

"If I say, I will not——" v. 9.

Jer. xix. 1–11; xx. 1–13.

the ear of the world. "That which my native country casteth away," wrote Jacob Behmen, a few months before his death, "other nations will take up." He, too, knew the heaven-kindled fire within, which would not be contained.

Savonarola, in his last sermon in Florence, March 18, 1498, declared that he had often vowed, in descending from the pulpit, never to preach again, that he would be quiet and leave all to God. But every time God compelled him to return, nor would He allow him to alter the burning message. "The word of the Lord has been a consuming fire in my bones and in my heart: I could not contain; I had to speak, because I felt myself burning, yea, in a white heat, from the Spirit of the Lord. . . . I cry, Silence! but the Spirit answers that He cannot rest."

Scourged by his trouble, Jeremiah finds his way back to God. Had he said in his haste that God had deceived him? The eclipse of faith is past: the beams of light are no longer held back. *The Lord is with me as a mighty one and a terrible: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail.* "Mighty and terrible" he had found Him to His own servant; how much more so to His foes! "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

v. 11.

1 Pet. iv. 18.

"Judge not."

The remainder of the chapter is more our problem than his. This man of heroic soul, strong to speak for God, brave to endure, curses his enemies and his birth.

It will be well to bring together his imprecations

upon his foes and detractors, who thwarted and marred his message and his work. They are found in xi. 20; xii. 3; xv. 15; xvii. 18; xviii. 23; xx. 11. They are, as Dr. Skinner expresses it, "startling in their concentrated force of passion." But we read them in the light of the face of the Lord Jesus Christ, with the words of His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. v. 43–45) and His Prayer on the Cross (Luke xxiii. 34) ringing in our hearts. Neither Jeremiah nor any of the prophets attained to "the prize of the high calling"; the world had to wait for the Son of God to become man to leave us an example, which the saintliest of all ages, before and after, had and have failed to give.

Jer. xix. 1–11; xx. 1–13.

1 Pet. ii. 21.

Some of his imprecations are due to a sense of personal injury; others are more impersonal, springing from his jealousy for God's holiness and right. Indeed, it is not easy to trace the dividing line between the two emotions; perhaps at times there is none. When we give due heed to his innate loathing of sin; how in body, mind, and spirit, he shrank from the daily view of its obscenity;—his outbursts go far to justify themselves. A soft age, dealing softly with sin, is not capable of true judgement here. When righteous indignation is at a discount, it is not necessarily due to richer grace, but to luxurious ease of mind and conscience. That the Prophet overstepped the line in some of his imprecations—as *e.g.* in xviii. 21–23—is, in the light of the face of Christ, perfectly clear; though even there let us not ignore his heart-broken cry: *Remember how I stood before Thee to speak good for*

Jer. xix. 1–11 ; xx. 1–13.

them, to turn away Thy fury from them. If he could ask God to "remember," he can ask that, at least from us. We shall then—recognising the limitations of a great soul, as we do when Dante commits his adversaries and those whom he disliked to the torments of Hell—we shall then see his wrath as through the deathlike mist of his anguish, and so bring ourselves humbly nearer the mind and way of Heaven—

> There is no place where earth's failings
> Have such kindly judgment given.

Of that kindly judgement, who but has need ?

An Application

God's spokesmen express God's inward constraint in varying terms, but agree as to its compulsive power. When Jacob Behmen was forbidden by the Council of his native town to publish his strange disturbing thoughts, he abstained for a while, but found it at last—after seven years of submission—too hard to bear. "I had resolved," he writes, "to do nothing in future, but to be quiet before God in obedience, and to let the Devil with all his host sweep over me. But it was with me as when a seed is hidden in the earth. It grows up in storm and rough weather against all reason. For in winter-time all is dead, and reason says, 'It is all over with it.' But the precious seed within me sprouted and grew green, oblivious of all storms, and amid disgrace and ridicule, it has blossomed forth into

a lily." Be it called fire or seed, it refuses to be "contained"; the living power of God is in it, and though it compel and burn, it is great riches in the end to the soul it constrains and to those who receive it. Jer. xix. 1–11; xx. 1–13.

A Supplication

O living God, when we see how Thy mightiest servants have suffered defeat in the dark battle-fields of the soul, give us all, however weak we may be, a sense of undivided comradeship. They were struggling and suffering, not for themselves alone, but for us all. We in them are wounded; and as Thou hast perfectly healed them, heal us with them. Their Redeemer was strong, and their Redeemer is ours. Establish Thou our souls in the endurance of Thy saints, yea, in the patience of Jesus Christ. Amen. Rev. i. 9.

XVIII

A GLIMPSE OF FOUR KINGS

The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, when king Zedekiah sent unto him Pashur the son of Melchiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, saying, Inquire, I pray thee, of the LORD for us; for Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon maketh war against us; if so be that the LORD will deal with us according to all his wondrous works, that he may go up from us. Then said Jeremiah unto them, Thus shall ye say to Zedekiah: Thus saith the LORD God of Israel; Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that *are* in your hands, wherewith ye fight against the king of Babylon, and *against* the Chaldeans, which besiege you without the walls, and I will assemble them into the midst of this city. And I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath. And I will smite the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast: they shall die of a great pestilence. And afterward, saith the LORD, I will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah, and his servants, and the people, and such as are left in this city from the pestilence, from the sword, and from the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those that seek their life: and he shall smite them with the edge of the sword; he shall not spare them, neither have pity, nor have mercy. And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death. He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth out, and falleth to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey. For I have set my face against this city for evil, and not for good, saith the LORD: it shall be given into the hand of the king of

Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire. And touching the house of the king of Judah, *say*, Hear ye the word of the LORD; O house of David, thus saith the LORD; Execute judgment in the morning, and deliver *him that is* spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, lest my fury go out like fire, and burn that none can quench *it*, because of the evil of your doings. Behold, I *am* against thee, O inhabitant of the valley, *and* rock of the plain, saith the LORD; which say, Who shall come down against us? or who shall enter into our habitations? But I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings, saith the LORD: and I will kindle a fire in the forest thereof, and it shall devour all things round about it. . . . Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place. For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people. But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation. For thus saith the LORD unto the king's house of Judah; Thou *art* Gilead unto me, *and* the head of Lebanon: *yet* surely I will make thee a wilderness, *and* cities *which* are not inhabited. And I will prepare destroyers against thee, every one with his weapons: and they shall cut down thy choice cedars, and cast *them* into the fire. And many nations shall pass by this city, and they shall say every man to his neighbour, Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this great city? Then they shall answer, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them. Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: *but* weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country. For thus saith the LORD touching Shallum the son of Josiah king of Judah, which reigned instead of Josiah his father, which went forth out of this place; He shall not return thither any more: but he shall die in the place whither they have led him captive, and shall see this land no more. Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; *that* useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work; that saith, I will build me a wide house and large chambers, and cutteth him out windows; and *it is* ceiled with cedar, and painted with vermilion. Shalt thou reign, because thou closest

thyself in cedar? did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgement and justice, *and* then *it was* well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then *it was* well *with him: was* not this to know me? saith the LORD. But thine eyes and thine heart *are* not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do *it*. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah; They shall not lament for him, *saying*, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! they shall not lament for him, *saying*, Ah lord! or, Ah his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem. . . . *As* I live, saith the LORD, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence.—JER. XXI. 1–14; XXII. 3–19, 24.

Jer. xxi. 1–14; xxii. 3–19, 24.

The Ethic of Prayer.

JERUSALEM was in a state of siege, and Zedekiah, in a fit of vacant optimism, sent to the Prophet requesting him to consult Jehovah. Knowing the king's shallow nature, we know that he only wanted to use God to alleviate his anxiety and to bring about unexpected deliverance apart from all moral obligations on the people's part. *Peradventure the Lord will deal with us according to all His wondrous works*—as though God's "wondrous works" were in the market for sale, and could be purchased on cheap terms. The effrontery of it all must have wounded Jeremiah to the quick: his reply is swift and shattering. Instead of Jehovah hastening to the help of the city's defenders, He would turn back

v. 2.

v. 5.

the weapons of war in their hands: *I Myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and a strong arm.* The Hand which had been stretched out in nobler periods of their history to help them, the Arm which had wrought "wondrous works" to deliver them, would now be against them. Would

they give ear to a counsel of despair, as there was no other counsel applicable or obtainable in their present faithless state? The way of life for them was to surrender, to "fall away" to the Chaldeans—and the phrase is no doubt meant to sting: the way of death was to abide in the city, and die by sword, famine, or pestilence. Even if they chose "the way of life," it would be no more than bare survival—*his life shall be unto him for a prey.* v. 9.

Jer. xxi. 1–14; xxii. 3–19, 24.

This royal deputation to the Prophet was probably sent during the early stages of the siege: another deputation was sent later (xxxvii. 3–10), in no better spirit. Their request—*Pray now unto the Lord our God for us*—was evidently little more than a magical formula: there was no moral amelioration to second it. The siege had been raised when the besiegers heard of the march of Pharaoh Hophra's army from Egypt against them: but the relief would be only temporary; the Chaldeans would return and certainly take the city. The Prophet's reply closes with words of inevitable doom: *For though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remained but wounded men among them, yet should they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire.* When God is captain even of the wounded, the ill-armed or the unarmed, they shall be more than conquerors.

The lyrics which follow probably belong to an earlier period of the Prophet's ministry; but they are fittingly placed here as supplying the moral ground of his stern, uncompromising replies to the royal deputations. The judgements of to-day are

Social Justice.

Jer. xxi. 1–14; xxii. 3–19, 24. the fruit of the wrongdoings of yesterday, when those wrongdoings have found no redress. These brief, passionate poems are filled more with a sense of social wrongs than of spiritual backsliding, though in the inmost mind of the Prophet the two are never separated. His call to amendment and redress

v. 10. rings clear as in the air of a young day: *Execute judgment in the morning and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor.* "In the morning": before financial after-thoughts have soiled the freshness of the Good Samaritan heart; "in the morning": when the heat of the day has not dried up

v. 13. the dews of Hermon. *Behold, I am against thee, O inhabitant* ["inhabitress," R.V. margin] *of the valley, and of the rock of the plain, saith the Lord.* The

xlix. 4. valley, the "flowing valley," is a pictorial synonym for prosperity, the rock for security: but if they have prospered through oppression, their security is not as the rock, but as shifting sand.

The call is repeated, and its contents are made

xxii. 3. still more minutely definite: *Execute ye judgement and righteousness . . . do no wrong, do no violence, to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.* The very commandments are a grave accusation: they blaze abroad the mean, heartless practices of war-profiteering.

vv. 4, 5. *If ye do this thing indeed*—justice and mercy instead of oppression and murder—the throne of David is made secure. *But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by Myself, saith the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation*—there will be no throne or house of David left! Will they still use "the

Temple," "the city of Jerusalem," "the throne of David"—*O My mountain in the field!*—as magical incantations? It will avail them nothing. *For thus saith the Lord, Thou art Gilead unto Me, and the head of Lebanon:* Gilead, land of balm, richly wooded, and Lebanon, cedar-crowned—and therefore unconditionally safe? Nay! *I will kindle a fire in her forest*—Mine own hand shall set My Gilead and Lebanon aflame: *yet surely I will make thee a wilderness . . . I will prepare destroyers against thee.* God Himself rules in the vicissitudes of nations; the planter and the woodcutter are instruments of His will: He guides and limits the devices of the one, He inspires and completes the work of the other. When Jerusalem, with its Temple of Jehovah and its throne of David, lies in ruins, *many nations shall pass by this city, and they shall say every man to his neighbour, Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this great city?* The question has mournfully echoed down the long centuries to this our own day; and the Divine reply ought to make us all tremble: *Because they forsook the covenant of the Lord their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them.* The use which our Lord made of the incidents of the Galileans "whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices," and of the eighteen killed by the fall of Siloam's tower, is the most edifying. Were they "sinners above all"? By no means: "but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Jer. xxi. 1–14; xxii. 3–19, 24. "Wherefore?" vv. 6, 7. v. 8. v. 9. Luke xiii. 1–5.

A tender elegy follows—for Shallum (Jehoahaz), the son of Josiah, who succeeded his father, but

A King in Exile. vv. 10, 11.

Jer. xxi. 1–14; xxii. 3–19, 24.

reigned for three months only, when he was taken captive by Pharaoh Necho, and died in exile in Egypt. The nation kept up its lamentation for Josiah, but here was cause for more bitter tears.

> Weep ye not for the dead,
> Neither bemoan him:
> But weep sore for him that goeth away;
> For he shall return no more,
> Nor see his native country.

Our tears and smiles are so often inapplicable or misapplied. We smile where we ought to weep, and weep where we ought to smile. And we weep sore in the presence of death, when we should keep those bitter tears for the day when we stand in the presence of shame.

A King's Shame.

From the tender grief of the elegy we are driven back, as by a wrathful whirlwind, to impassioned denunciation. Once more we are made to feel the poignant sense of social wrongs, due directly to the king's love of luxurious living and pomp of dwellings. Jehoiakim is set in damaging contrast with his father Josiah: *Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment? then it was well with him. He* lived temperately and ruled as a true king should. *He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Was not this to know Me? saith the Lord.* Such an appreciation any ruler of men might covet, with its fine equation of social rightness and real piety. "Was not this to know Me?" is far on the way to our Lord's Parable: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." So the father: what of the son?

Matt. xxv. 31–46.

Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, Jer. xxi.
And his chambers by injustice; 1–14;
That useth his neighbour's service without wages, xxii. 3–
And giveth him not his hire; 19, 24.
That saith,
I will build me a wide house
And spacious chambers;
And cutteth him out windows; and it is ceiled with cedar,
And painted with vermilion.

Forced labour—the corvée system in its cruellest, most inhuman form, when the labourer had neither wage nor security of life, and all to satisfy the wasteful vanity of a king whose State was already in the twilight of doom—what degeneracy for a son of Josiah!

Wilt thou thus play the king, v. 15.
Fussing with cedar?

—is Sir George Adam Smith's striking and illuminating translation. The condemnation is summed up in the terrible verdict: *Thine eyes and thine heart* v. 17. *are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it.* No eyes for the black approach of disaster, no heart for the miseries and sorrows of his people—as on the eve of the French Revolution. The twin vices of covetousness and luxury blind a man's eyes and deaden his heart: he becomes Dives, with Lazarus starving and dying in his sores at his gate.

Jehoiachin followed his father in the evil way, A Cast-off King.
and therefore God had no use for him, except to let
him go into captivity—a broken vessel, cast to the v. 28.
rubbish as useless. That he sat on the throne of

Jer. xxi. 1–14; xxii. 3–19, 24. David would not save him, seeing his life and rule dishonoured the throne. Were he a signet upon God's right hand, God would pluck him thence as one that had forfeited His favour and His love. No sacred tradition of the past can protect a man when he forsakes the good way.

The last chapter in the Book (lii.) relates the end of his pitiful story. After thirty-seven years as captive, he was lifted from prison by Evil-Merodach, lii. 31–33. and his throne set above the thrones of his royal fellow-captives: which was worse, to be a captive in prison, or a pampered favourite? his body in chains, or his vassal soul in chains?

An Application

The social and moral condition of Jerusalem, on the eve of disaster, verifies the unpleasant truth that a great peril produces two different and opposite effects. It calls forth courage, sympathy, self-sacrifice, chivalry, on the one hand; but it also provides the unprincipled with opportunities to oppress, to profiteer, to revel in luxury, to sow a harvest of abnormal vice. Much of the misery in Jerusalem was not due to the siege and the besiegers, but to the inhumanity of those within the walls, king, prince, merchant, judge. Danger makes godless people cruel. As it was two millenniums and a half ago, so has it repeated itself, on the scale of continents, during the years since August, 1914; nor has the flood of unrighteousness passed, if it has at all abated. The spirit of Christ, the costly

chivalry of the Cross, true communion and fellowship of the Holy Ghost—these are our one hope of deliverance and regeneration, socially as well as morally. Jer. xxi. 1–14; xxii. 3–19, 24.

A Supplication

O Thou Who art the Saviour and Judge of all men, make us afraid of selfish thought and selfish deed. Teach us to see in the weak an opportunity to protect, in the poor a chance to love. In sore and long trials keep our hearts sweet with the fragrance of the Cross of Christ. Let not our pleasures deprive others of ordinary wellbeing: let not our comforts make others poorer; let not our liberty be at the cost of others in chains. Breathe Thy charity on the souls of the classes, and of the nations. We know that Thou hast spoken to us in the day of prosperity, and we have not given heed; give us grace to be more attentive in the day of adversity. Amen.

XIX

HIRELING SHEPHERDS

Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture ! saith the LORD. Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people : Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them : behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD. And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds ; and they shall be fruitful and increase. And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them : and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely : and this *is* his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that they shall no more say, The LORD liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt ; but, The LORD liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them ; and they shall dwell in their own land. . . . For both prophet and priest are profane ; yea, in my house have I found their wickedness, saith the LORD. Wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery *ways* in the darkness : they shall be driven on, and fall therein : for I will bring evil upon them, *even* the year of their visitation, saith the LORD. . . . Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you : they make you vain : they speak a vision of their own heart, *and* not out of the mouth of the LORD. They say still unto them that despise me, The LORD hath said, Ye shall have peace ; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil

shall come upon you. For who hath stood in the counsel of the LORD, and hath perceived and heard his word? who hath marked his word, and heard *it?* Behold, a whirlwind of the LORD is gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind: it shall fall grievously upon the head of the wicked. The anger of the LORD shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly. I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings. *Am* I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD. I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. How long shall *this* be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, *they are* prophets of the deceit of their own heart; which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal. The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What *is* the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD. *Is* not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer *that* breaketh the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I *am* against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour. Behold, I *am* against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith. Behold, I *am* against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD. And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What *is* the burden of the LORD? thou shalt then say unto them, What burden? I will even forsake you, saith the LORD. And *as for* the prophet, and the priest, and the people, that shall say, The burden of the LORD, I will even punish that man and his house. Thus shall ye say every one to his neighbour, and every one to his brother, What hath the LORD answered? and, What hath the LORD spoken? And the burden of the LORD shall ye mention no more: for every man's word shall be his burden; for ye have perverted the words of

the living God, of the LORD of hosts our God. Thus shalt thou say to the prophet, What hath the LORD answered thee ? and, What hath the LORD spoken ? But since ye say, The burden of the LORD ; therefore thus saith the LORD ; Because ye say this word, The burden of the LORD, and I have sent unto you, saying, Ye shall not say, The burden of the LORD ; therefore, behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, *and cast you* out of my presence : and I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten.—JER. XXIII. 1–8, 11, 12, 16–40.

Jer. xxiii. 1–8, 11, 12, 16–40.

THIS chapter is a Manual of Devotion for all leaders and pastors. The devout reading of it will not be without much searching of heart, deepening into dismay ; but it will also help to produce and encourage Baxter's " Reformed Pastor." Jeremiah had in view political leaders as well as religious teachers : they are weighed in the balances, and found wanting. *Woe unto the shepherds that destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture ! saith the Lord.* God proclaims Himself as the owner of states and churches : those appointed to watch over both and guide them must render their account to Him, and in the account misrule will be reckoned a crime. Here the shepherds are accused of scattering the flock, of driving them away, of not visiting them : worldly policy, false prophesying, and ruthless oppression had destroyed the nation : *behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the Lord.*

Responsibility.

v. 1.

v. 2.

Before dealing with the Messianic promise (vv. 5–8), it may be well to follow the examination of the False Prophets.

v. 11.

1. *They are accused of Profanity.—For both prophet and priest are profane ; yea, in My house*

have I found their wickedness. Irreverent dealing with any truth—of science, of economics, of art, of theology—is profanity. It is ugly and dangerous anywhere, but worst of all in God's house; because there its effects are more profoundly disastrous. *From the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land.* An irreverent teacher creates an irreverent class; an undevout preacher mars the devotion of his audience. If "an undevout astronomer is mad," in his converse with suns and stars, what of him who is herald of the Sun of Righteousness, witness of the Bright and Morning Star, if he trifles and speaks falsely? *Wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery places in the darkness: they shall be driven on and fall therein.* The old paths they do not favour, the straight way they will not have; they wander over moors and marshes, and lose their foothold, in thick darkness, there being no oil in their vessels to feed their dying lamps.

Jer. xxiii. 1–8, 11, 12, 16–40.

For the Profane, God has no Message.

v. 15.

v. 12.

2. *They are accused of Falsification.*—In their thirst for popular favour, they issue counterfeit revelations. *They say continually unto them that despise Me, The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace; and unto every one that walketh in the stubbornness of his own heart they say, No evil shall come upon you.* To Jeremiah the genuine word of the Lord brought pain and anguish of soul; he shook with fear, his heart within him broken; he was helpless as a drunken man, *because of the Lord, and because of His holy words.* But these light-hearted rivals, speaking *a vision of their own heart, and not out of*

Merchants of Lies.

v. 17.

v. 9.

v. 16.

Jer. xxiii. 1–8, 11, 12, 16–40.

the mouth of the Lord, had no misgiving, no sorrow of soul. Though God did not send them, *yet they ran ;* and unhappily the messengers of falsehood often run more eagerly to cry their wares, than messengers of truth. No man can perceive and hear God's word, without "standing" in His council, and devoutly pondering over it. Let all leaders of the people, all pastors of congregations, prove themselves by the time and devout study they give, not to visions of their own heart, but to "standing" in the Lord's council, and "marking" well His word. *If they had stood in My council, then had they caused My people to hear My words, and had turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.* This is the haunting fear of the true pastor—how he might have saved the people had he been more loyal at all costs to his Lord! The falsifier of truth will have himself to face the tempest of fury, *the whirling tempest*, which he has refused to publish in his forecast. Such a storm Dante pictures in the punishment of falsifiers of truth, the "violent against God":

v. 21.

v. 22.

v. 19.

O'er all the sandy desert fell below
Large flakes of fire, as when on Alpine hill,
While sleep the winds, are falling flakes of snow.
As Alexander in the glowing lands
Of Eastern Ind, saw solid balls of fire
Descend in showers upon his warrior bands ;
And ordered straight, with provident command,
That each should trample on the vapours dire,
Lest they unite and spread o'er all the sand ;—
Fell thus eternally the fiery rain ;
Whence, like to tinder under flint and steel,
The soil ignited to augment their pain.

The brief phrase of the Hebrew prophet and the more elaborate picture of the Italian seer suggest the same conception of the punishment of those who are false to God—the falsehood breeds its own peculiar storm (cp. V. 14). Jer. xxiii. 1–8, 11, 12, 16–40.

3. *They are accused of forging Dreams.*—This is another and more concrete description of their falsifications of God's word. It was really the "vision of their own heart," but they pretended that the revelation came to them in the form of an authentic dream. *I have heard what the prophets have said, that prophesy lies in My name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed* (cp., for the ironic mimicry in phrase-repeating, vii. 4). It was a convenient and plausible pretence. Dreams as media of Divine revelations appealed to the popular fancy—and still frequently do. But to call a message a dream from God, when it was nothing but the wild fruit of "the deceit of their own heart," was to incur the traitor's doom. Let the trafficker in dreams label his ware "dreams"; *and he that hath My word, let him speak My word faithfully.* There must be no confusing of the straw with the wheat. Does any one ask how the genuine word of God may be recognised? The answer is that it is like a fire, consuming all dross of thought, all habits of evil, all empty religious forms. What though they have made their faces "harder than a rock? there is no rock so hard that God's hammer cannot break it in pieces. Guilty of Forgery. v. 25. v. 26. v. 3. v. 29.

The nations to-day are pestered and confused with "dreams"—economic, literary, opportunist,

Jer. xxiii. 1–8, 11, 12, 16–40.

magical, ecclesiastic. There is the same temptation to claim for each of them high authority of earth or even of heaven. *Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He saith.* Let the vain, conceited dreamer tell it as a dream—his very own!—and it will prove less harmful: it will find its place among the discarded lies and lightness of the past in some Vale of Hinnom. The phrase itself—they "use their tongues" to advertise their shams with "*He* saith"—proclaims the hollowness of their claim.

v. 31.

v. 32.

To be forgotten of God.

4. *They bring about their own Punishment.*—The false prophets, borrowing the language of the true prophet, called their utterance "The Burden of the Lord." Burden of the Lord? yea, verily, *they* had become His burden—too heavy, too wearisome to be borne! *I will cast you off, saith the Lord,* as no longer tolerable; nay, still more terrible—*I will utterly forget you . . . and I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you.* So in the solemn warnings of our Lord: "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? . . . And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity." The evil is deeper than the forms and formulas they use—divination, seance, forged ecstasy: "it is the men themselves who are false," as Dr. Skinner illuminatingly remarks on the whole subject; "and to a false heart no true revelation is vouchsafed." They lose the taste for truth; in deluding others they delude themselves; they shall be visited with the evil of their doings (v. 2; iv. 18).

v. 34.

Matt. vii. 22, 23.

And at the last to be disowned of the Lord Himself— that will be an "everlasting reproach." Jer. xxiii. 1–8, 11, 12, 16–40.

Verses 23, 24 have proved hard to interpret—or else have yielded various meanings.

> Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord,
> And not a God afar off?
> Can any hide himself in secret places
> That I shall not see him?
> Do not I fill heaven and earth?
> Saith the Lord.

God is near and afar off—*i.e.* He is omnipresent; no one can hide from Him anywhere—*i.e.* He is omniscient. The Septuagint makes the first clause affirmative.

> I am a God who is near,
> Not a God who is far.

This would directly apply to the false prophets: they must not take refuge in a conception of God's remoteness, as if He were too far to take note of their doings and sayings (cp. Ps. cxxxix. 1–12).

In the midst of these pastoral warnings comes the Messianic vision of the Branch (vv. 5–8). Isaiah had already spoken of a Branch of the roots of Jesse (xv. 1); and our Lord speaks of Himself as the True Vine (John xv. 1–7); Jeremiah finds his way into the same realm of symbols. The emphasis here is on the Kingship of the Messiah; the vision is repeated to bring out His priestly office.

Jer. xxiii. 1–8, 11, 12, 16–40.

An Application

It is a great gift of God—the gift of good shepherds, of faithful and pure-minded leaders for the State, and for the Church. But in both cases, the people themselves help or hinder God. It is true that He gives what they deserve—now a Saul, now a David; now a Hezekiah, now a Manasseh; now a Titzel, now a Luther. Therefore let the people pray to be made worthy of God's great gift of good pastors and true leaders. But the shepherds must also honour their calling as an appointment of God. The political leader will have to render as strict an account of his stewardship to God, as the ecclesiastical leader. Responsibility is not limited within church walls; it covers the whole community and includes every man who teaches or leads.

A Supplication

O God, the Giver of every good and perfect gift, furnish Thy Church to-day with true pastors, and Thy people in every land with true leaders. Let them be men after Thine own heart, with a single eye to do Thy will and make Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Deliver them from pride of place, from the mere show and reward of office: keep them devout in spirit, humble in mind, strong in Thy fear, ready when Thou biddest them to close their account and appear before Thee. Increase the number of those who will not hasten to be shepherds after Thee. O Thou True Branch of Righteousness, enrich them with Thy life and clothe them with Thy beauty. Amen.

XX

AFTER TWENTY-THREE YEARS

The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, that *was* the first year of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; the which Jeremiah the prophet spake unto all the people of Judah, and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, even unto this day, that *is* the three and twentieth year, the word of the LORD hath come unto me, and I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye have not hearkened. . . . Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations. Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle. And this whole land shall be a desolation, *and* an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, *that* I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations. And I will bring upon that land all my words which I have pronounced against it, *even* all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah hath prophesied against all the nations. . . . For thus saith the LORD God of Israel unto me; Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause

all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it. And they shall drink, and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them. Then took I the cup at the LORD's hand, and made all the nations to drink, unto whom the LORD had sent me: *to wit*, Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, and the kings thereof, and the princes thereof, to make them a desolation, an astonishment, an hissing, and a curse; as *it is* this day; Pharaoh king of Egypt, and his servants, and his princes, and all his people; . . . And all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another, and all the kingdoms of the world, which *are* upon the face of the earth: and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them. Therefore thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Drink ye, and be drunken, and spue, and fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you. And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup at thine hand to drink, then shalt thou say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Ye shall certainly drink. For, lo, I begin to bring evil on the city which is called by my name, and should ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be unpunished: for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, saith the LORD of hosts. . . . A noise shall come *even* to the ends of the earth; for the LORD hath a controversy with the nations, he will plead with all flesh; he will give them *that are* wicked to the sword, saith the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth. And the slain of the LORD shall be at that day from *one* end of the earth even unto the *other* end of the earth: they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung upon the ground. Howl, ye shepherds, and cry; and wallow yourselves *in the ashes*, ye principal of the flock: for the days of your slaughter and of your dispersions are accomplished; and ye shall fall like a pleasant vessel. And the shepherds shall have no way to flee, nor the principal of the flock to escape. . . . The word that Jeremiah the prophet spake unto Baruch the son of Neriah, when he had written these words in a book at the mouth of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, unto thee, O Baruch; Thou didst say, Woe is me now! for the LORD hath added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest. Thus shalt thou say unto him, The LORD saith thus; Behold, *that* which I have built will I

break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up, even this whole land. And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek *them* not: for, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the LORD: but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest.—JER. XXV. 1–3, 8–13, 15–19, 26–29, 31–35; XLV. 1–5.

I

A DARK RETROSPECT

THE life and work of Jeremiah can be more adequately reviewed and more justly estimated from a distance than near at hand. During his lifetime he seemed to have his dwelling among the shadows of failure, chill and unshifting and ever darkening. So he himself felt in reviewing his prophetic ministry towards the end of twenty-three years—*the same was the first year of Nebuchadrezzar King of Babylon.* Faithfully and consistently he had been the spokesman of the Lord, *rising up early and speaking* whenever his Master called. And the results of it all, apparently, could be summed up in the desolate sentence—*Ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear.* God had to impress into His service the King of Babylon, as an instrument, however undesirable, undoubtedly fitted for its penal purpose. When he has accomplished his punitive task, the sound of the millstones will be silent in the land, the light of the candle quenched in the home. The servitude will last for seventy years: then the wheel will have turned and Babylon will be judged and overwhelmed. And during that period all the nations will have to drink

Jer xxv. 1–3, 8–13, 15–19, 26–29, 31–35; xlv. 1–5.

v. 3.

vv. 8–14.

vv. 15–31.

Jer. xxv. 1–3, 8–13, 15–19, 26–29, 31–35 ; xlv. 1–5.

An Unwelcome Cup.

the wine-cup of the Lord's fury. The Prophet saw himself offering to nation after nation the maddening cup ; they shrank back in horror, but there could be no escape : *Ye shall surely drink.* Nations cannot cut off the entail of their evil doings. If God has not spared His own Jerusalem, how could any city hope to escape ?—*For, lo, I begin to work evil at the city which is called by My name, and should ye be utterly unpunished ?* (cp. 1 Pet. iv. 17 ; Isa. x. 12). It would pass like a plague " from nation to nation," as each nation had predisposed itself for its attack. *The Lord hath a controversy with the nations* (cp. Isa. i.). There is hope for the righteous ; but, for the wicked, the sword. Official pre-eminence will not deliver any one : *the shepherds shall have no way to flee, nor the principal of the flock to escape.*

There are pictured—

The Year of Crisis.

1. *The International Outlook.*—At the time of his call, Jeremiah already had a presentiment that his prophetic ministry was not to be confined within the boundaries of Judah or of Palestine. The impact of the outer world was too powerful, too violent, for his young mind to be unaffected. With the passing of the fateful years, the impression was deepened, and the horizons still further widened. The battle of Carchemish in this same year—his twenty-third—would burn it into his very soul. All nations must be in the hand of God, to pull down or to build. There can be no geographical or racial limits to His Providence, to His awards in righteous judgement, and ultimately to His redeem-

ing mercy (xlviii. 47, and *passim*). Egypt was defeated at Carchemish, but even to Egypt God will vouchsafe a new hope (xlvi. 26). Jer. xxv. 1–3, 8–13, 15–19, 26–29, 31–35; xlv. 1–5.

It is one thing to write "international"; it is much harder to lift it from paper and make it a live force in the mind and practice of all nations—as our discouraging progress in creating the League of Nations proves. But it is not a day's task, or even a twenty-three years' task: it is something to remain in the calendar of all Time till it is accomplished.

2. *The Social Outlook.*—Jeremiah makes it clear that he was the friend of the poorer classes. It has been surmised that, when he came at first from his rural home to the city, his earlier contacts were with these; such a theory is suggested by the language employed in vv. 4, 5. At any rate he never ceased befriending them, even when he had to plead their cause before such a luxurious tyrant as Jehoiakim (xxii. 13–17; see also vv. 26–29). In keeping with this, the emphasis in the predictions of this chap. xxv. is on the destruction of the leaders (vv. 34–37)—"pleasant" vessels, but so fragile in the day of the trembling of the hills! *And the shepherds shall have no way to flee, nor the principal of the flock to escape.* They had betrayed their trust, and forged the chain of their own doom. vv. 32–38. Faithless Leaders. v. 35.

Not so clearly at first sight, perhaps, but quite as impressively, the truth that social injustice brings ruin upon itself is brought out in the Prophet's treatment of Nebuchadrezzar. He appears as God's instrument of justice—*My servant;* and the v. 9.

Jer. xxv. 1–3, 8–13, 15–19, 26–29, 31–35 ; xlv. 1–5.

portrait of him in the Book of Daniel is not without attractive features. There were elements of good in his character. His theology and religion were not altogether pagan: he was not blind to the light of a higher revelation. And if his treatment of Zedekiah (lii. 10, 11) proves him to have been an Eastern monarch, of his age and his region, Saladin—as it has been pointed out—a millennium and a half later, dealt still more atrociously with Raymond after the battle of Hattin. But power spoilt him ; the tyrant in him overcame the better man. So the Prophet foretells the recompense of God to him, in turn, for his and his nation's iniquity. In chaps. l. and li. the same ethical note—Babylon's plunder of the nations and her social outrages bringing on her utter ruin—is struck more than once (l. 11–16 ; li. 33–37).

vv. 12–14.

II

A Loyal Friend

Baruch.

He had gained at least one loyal disciple, in the midst of the sorrows and hostilities of his ministry. What Elisha was to Elijah, Mark to Peter, Brother Leo to St. Francis of Assisi, that Baruch was to Jeremiah. He is for the most part content to remain hidden in the shadow of his master. He comes visibly into the narrative in the prophet's critical twenty-third year, as a competent scribe writing down from dictation the prophetic messages, which brought both of them into mortal peril. But the peril of his task did not frighten him from

continuing to do it. He wrote the second copy, with the " many like words " added, when he knew that it was at the risk of his life. He earned the reward of those who receive " a prophet in the name of a prophet " (Matt. x. 41).

Jer. xxv. 1–3, 8–13, 15–19, 26–29, 31–35 ; xlv. 1–5. xxxvi. 32

He was no merely mechanical scribe : he also was a man " subject to like passions as we are," and knew the soreness of the conflict. *Woe is me now ! for the Lord hath added sorrow to my pain : I am weary with my groaning, and I find no rest.* So Baruch moaned, in that dark year—" the fourth year of Jehoiakim "—the year of the battle of Carchemish. The sense of vast ruin was too much for him. But there was also, apparently, some private ambition which he had cherished : in the overthrow of the whole land this was threatened. With all this he had to suffer the Prophet's reproof : *And seekest thou great things for thyself ? seek them not.* There are national crises which make lawful ambitions unlawful ; as there are business pursuits and domestic ties which become sinful when they keep a man away from God. Is it man alone that suffers disappointment because his purpose is hindered, or thwarted ? God also has to break down what He has built, and pluck up what He has planted. Let Baruch bow his head in submission and meet his fate in the shelter of God's wing. For himself, the Prophet economised comfort ; for the servant also he is sparing in consolations. But it is at the same time a tribute to Baruch's grit and worth, that he should be treated on the plane of heroic souls.

Luke xiv. 16–24.

Jer. xxv. 1–3, 8–13, 15–19, 26–29, 31–35; xlv. 1–5.

He submitted, and continued to be a faithful disciple. Probably to him we owe the preservation of his master's addresses and songs, and much valuable biographical matter. "Companion in labour, and fellow-soldier" (Phil. ii. 25, 29, 30), he has gained immortal honour by the side of his master. His natural life was given him of God "for a prey"—*in all places whither thou goest;* but his true soul-life, overcoming the ills of his ruinous age, shines imperishable, having secured to the world the great literary and moral legacy of the Poet-Prophet.

An Application

After twenty-three years, Jeremiah had reached early middle age—in ordinary life the beginning of disillusionment. As he had from early youth walked in the shadow of his own sorrow-laden mission, he had probably less illusions than most, to mourn their passing. But he *had* seen, with the inward eye as well as the eye of flesh, the almond-tree blossoming; and yet what springtime of flowers and singing birds had he seen? His Lord still delayed His mercy. So that he, like Habakkuk, might often pray—"O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years!" There is a cycle of devotion and prayers needed for middle age; so that when gradual disillusionment proceeds, we may pass from perished dreams and lost hopes to a securer faith and hope that maketh not ashamed. Illusions of early life, even if they all pass, have their office to fulfil—as blossoms of fruit trees. Between the

Hab. iii. 2.

fading of the blossom and the ripening of the fruit, there is a drab period: but it is serviceable and needful, and therefore to be well-guarded. Jer. xxv. 1–3, 8–13, 15–19, 26–29, 31–35; xlv. 1–5.

A Supplication

Help us, O Lord, to be men of the times, in that we should wisely rule our life according to the changing seasons. Help us to understand when lawful things are not convenient; when great things for ourselves may stand in the way of greater things for others. Save us from belittling our task to-day, because of some higher work we expect to be employed in on the morrow. Nay, teach us that we cannot be fit for the higher task, should we neglect the lower. In this and in all things give us the mind of Christ. Amen.

XXI

FALSE, THOUGH SEEMING TRUE

In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, came this word unto Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Thus saith the LORD to me ; Make thee bonds and yokes, and put them upon thy neck, and send them to the king of Edom, and to the king of Moab, and to the king of the Ammonites, and to the king of Tyrus, and to the king of Zidon, by the hand of the messengers which come to Jerusalem unto Zedekiah king of Judah ; and command them to say unto their masters, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel ; Thus shall ye say unto your masters ; I have made the earth, the man and the beast that *are* upon the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto me. And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant ; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him. And all nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the very time of his land come : and then many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of him. And it shall come to pass, *that* the nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, saith the LORD, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand. Therefore hearken not ye to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanters, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon : for they prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land ; and that I should drive you out, and ye should perish. But the nations that bring their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him, those will I let remain still in their

own land, saith the LORD; and they shall till it, and dwell therein. . . . Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke from off the prophet Jeremiah's neck, and brake it. And Hananiah spake in the presence of all the people, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all nations within the space of two full years. And the prophet Jeremiah went his way. Then the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah *the prophet*, after that Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke from off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, saying, Go and tell Hananiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Thou hast broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron. For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; I have put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him: and I have given him the beasts of the field also. Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; The LORD hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will cast thee from off the face of the earth: this year thou shalt die, because thou hast taught rebellion against the LORD. So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month. . . . Now these *are* the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem unto the residue of the elders which were carried away captives, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon; (after that Jeconiah the king, and the queen, and the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, and the carpenters, and the smiths, were departed from Jerusalem,) by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, (whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent unto Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,) saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon; Build ye houses, and dwell *in them;* and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; that ye may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace. For thus saith the LORD of hosts,

the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners, that *be* in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the LORD. For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. . . . *Know* that thus saith the LORD of the king that sitteth upon the throne of David, and of all the people that dwelleth in this city, *and* of your brethren that are not gone forth with you into captivity; thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will send upon them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like vile figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so evil. . . . Send to all them of the captivity, saying, Thus saith the LORD concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite; Because that Shemaiah hath prophesied unto you, and I sent him not, and he caused you to trust in a lie: therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite, and his seed: he shall not have a man to dwell among this people; neither shall he behold the good that I will do for my people, saith the LORD; because he hath taught rebellion against the LORD.—JER. XXVII. 1–11; XXVIII. 10–17; XXIX. 1–13, 16, 17, 31, 32.

Jer. xxvii. 1–11; xxviii. 10–17; xxix. 1–13, 16, 17, 31, 32.

ZEDEKIAH, appointed by Nebuchadrezzar to be king over the national remnant left in Judah, figures in the narrative as helplessly incompetent in such a critical climax of history. As with Hamlet, "an oak-tree was planted in a costly vase which should have received into its bosom only flowers"—and the spreading roots burst the vase. He must have often felt, if he had not enough force of character to express such a sentiment—

> The time is out of joint: O cursèd spite,
> That ever I was born to set it right!

False, though seeming True

The "princes" left to be the subject-king's counsellors were inferior in every way to the "elders" carried captive to Babylon. Jer. xxvii. 1–11;

In the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign secret rebellion against Babylon was seething in Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon; and Judah was drawn into the fatal conspiracy. Jeremiah, always faithful to a pro-Chaldean policy, is charged of God to make himself "bands and bars"—*i.e.* a yoke bound with its cords—and use them as a symbol for the kings of the conspiring nations, whose ambassadors were at the time in Jerusalem with Zedekiah. The Prophet appeared bearing his symbolic yoke, and prefaced the message with a declaration of God's sovereignty: *I have made the earth, the man, and the beast that are upon the face of the earth, by My great power and by My outstretched arm; and I give it unto him that seemeth right unto Me.* The terms of the message are suggestive: God in choosing His instrument does not overlook the genuine rights and ultimate well-being of men and beasts. The king may be a scourge or a staff; but God wields either for His own great ends. For the time being Nebuchadrezzar was His instrument—*My servant* (v. 6): therefore to rebel against the servant was to rebel against the Most High God, and the revolters would be punished. God had appointed the termination of the Chaldean world-supremacy; but until then Babylon must and shall rule. Jer. xxviii. 10–17; xxix. 1–13, 16, 17, 31, 32. A Parable for Revolters. v. 5.

The times had—as such times usually do—produced a prolific crop of would-be prophets and a vv. 8–11.

Jer. xxvii. 1–11 ; xxviii. 10–17 ; xxix. 1–13, 16, 17, 31, 32.

motley crowd of charlatans: prophets, diviners, dreamers, soothsayers, sorcerers. They were as a body anti-Chaldean, and altogether clamorous and overbearing. *I have not sent them, saith the Lord, but they prophesy falsely in My name.* When Jeremiah appeared before the king, the priests, and the people, one can imagine how he and his yoke provoked ridicule: but he was inured to that, as a shepherd of the mountains to rough weather. The motley group had been giving it out boldly—to kindle the fire of swift revolt—that the precious vessels of the Temple would be shortly brought back from Babylon. The Prophet denounced the lying tongues, ending with his patient appeal,

v. 9.

Hananiah.

v. 17.

Hearken not unto them; serve the king of Babylon, and live: wherefore should this city become a desolation?

It was the voice of wise and true patriotism, although it sounded criminally unpatriotic. And his opponents—ever "wise to do evil," with "faces harder than a rock"—saw how he had placed himself in their hands as a renegade patriot. It has also to be kept in mind that there were in the mixed host of his opponents some who were sincere and, according to their light, genuinely patriotic. Probably Hananiah could be so reckoned—able, conscientious, and confident in his fitness to transact business with God. Some time later he came to Jeremiah in the Temple and spoke to him publicly, as one who had just received the Lord's message that He had broken Babylon's yoke, and "within two full years" the captives would return

iv. 22.

v. 3.

and all the sacred vessels would be restored. Jeremiah, apparently, felt puzzled: what if this were a later word from God than he had received? He therefore contented himself with a provisional assent—*Amen; the Lord do so: the Lord perform thy words which thou hast prophesied.* It was the desire and prayer of his heart, whatever his misgiving may have been. As if to clear his own mind as well as to give safer data to his hearers for forming a just judgment, he reminds them that as a prophet of woe he is in the true prophetic succession. That had been the Divine commission from the first dawn of authentic prophecy: *The prophets that have been before me and before thee of old prophesied against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence.* The exception was to have a prophet specially sent to prophesy of peace; still if such was sent of God, time would verify his forecast and establish his good name. Hananiah, instead of a reply in words, dramatically took the yoke from the prophet's neck in sight of the people and broke it, repeating his prediction that within two full years "even so" would the Lord break Babylon's yoke *from off the neck of all the nations.* He again sealed it with a "Thus saith the Lord." It is easy to imagine what a popular triumph he had—for the moment.

Jer. xxvii. 1–11; xxviii. 10–17; xxix. 1–13, 16, 17, 31, 32.

xxvii. 6.

v. 8.

v. 11.

And the other? *The prophet Jeremiah went his way.* He must have time to be alone with God. As later he took ten days for prayer and Divine conference, so now he waited upon the Lord, for confirmation or disavowal of Hananiah's message.

Alone with God.

xlii. 7.

Jer. xxvii. 1–11; xxviii. 10–17; xxix. 1–13, 16, 17, 31, 32. vv. 15, 16.

He returned with his worst fears confirmed. Hananiah had unlawfully used the name of God to cover his groundless optimism. Hananiah had broken the wooden yoke; but God had His iron yoke for substitute, which none could break. So Jeremiah made his reply, and then passed to sterner words: *Hear now, Hananiah; the Lord hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie.* Continuing, he foretold his death that year, *because thou hast spoken rebellion against the Lord.* Two months later Hananiah had passed away "from off the face of the earth"—at least spared something worse than death had he lived for his "two full years" to see his forecast falsified.

It is possible that Hananiah may have all along deceived himself; that his intention was not so false as his exposition. His example ought to be a searchlight to help us all to discover God's sign and word in us, without in any way revising and altering it to our own liking. "The prophet whose words are unpalatable to his hearers," says Dr. Bennett, "is more likely to have a true inspiration than the man who kindles their fancy with glowing pictures of an imminent millennium."

Chap. XXIX. A Letter to Exiles.

Turning his mind and deep concern to his fellow-countrymen in exile, including King Jeconiah and the queen-mother Nehushta, Jeremiah addressed them a letter by the hand of two friendly officials sent to Babylon on a diplomatic mission. It was a letter of prudent though unpalatable advice—let them be content with their exile, and let them look forward patiently to a long period of it. Let them

settle down, build lasting houses and plant gardens ; and they were to seek the peace of Babylon, *and pray unto the Lord for it*—in beautiful accord with the great human teaching of the Book of Jona ;— *for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.* He knew beforehand that his message would be opposed and belittled by the dream-prophets and diviners who were also carried away into captivity. God's purposed term was seventy years, and no false dreams could shorten it. At the end of that period, God's gracious promise would be honoured. *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you hope in your latter end.* The words have a value for all time : the thoughts which God thinks about His own are often so different from the perplexing course of things ; while they are burdened and pressed, He is preparing for them a latter end of sure hope. But the promise, as always, is conditional : it will depend on their nurture of a devout, praying mind. *And ye shall seek Me and find Me, when ye search for Me with all your heart.* God always first finds us, and moves us by His Spirit to search for Him ; and the finding of Him is the hope and end of our being.

Jer. xxvii. 1–11 ; xxviii. 10–17 ; xxix. 1–13, 16, 17, 31, 32. v. 7. v. 11. v. 13.

The disobedient, therefore, could have no share in the fulfilment of the promise—be he king of David's line, or any of the rank and file of the people left behind in Jerusalem. For the hardened and unrepentant, *the sword, the famine, and the pestilence :* they are but " vile figs " too bad to be eaten (cp. xxiv. 18).

vv. 16–18.

Jer. xxvii. 1–11 ; xxviii. 10–17 ; xxix. 1–13, 16, 17, 31, 32.

As the Prophet had anticipated, it happened. Two prophets, guilty of adultery as well as false pretences, had their fearful punishment foretold. Let men but begin to falsify God's truth, and there is no end to their moral degeneracy. One of the exiles actually sent letters to some of the authorities in Jerusalem, upbraiding them for their slackness in not putting Jeremiah "in the stocks and in shackles." The letter was shown to Jeremiah, who called his letter "speaking rebellion against the Lord," and pronounced judgment upon him also (v. 32). "To counterfeit the hand of God," wrote Milton, "is the boldest of all forgery: and he who, without warrant but his own fantastic surmise, takes upon him perpetually to unfold the secret and unsearchable mysteries of high Providence, is likely for the most part to mistake and slander them; and approaches to the madness of those reprobate thoughts that would wrest the sword of justice out of God's hand, and employ it more justly in their own conceit."

vv. 21–32.

An Application

God's omniscience is comfort to the godly, and terror to the evil-doer—as the pillar of cloud in the Red Sea gave light by night to the Israelites, while it was a "cloud of darkness" to the Egyptians. The message of God to the penitent among the exiles in Babylon was—*I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace.* But when speaking to the two adulterous false

xxix. 11.

prophets, the words of comfort become words of terror—*I am He that knoweth, and am witness, saith the Lord.* When the Church has her dark days, and the purpose of God seems clouded, it is enough to be assured that God knows the thoughts that He thinks toward her, to give hope in her latter end. But the evil-doer's most secret sin, of thought or deed, is no secret to the God of perfect knowledge : "I am witness."

Jer. xxvii. 1–11 ; xxviii. 10–17 ; xxix. 1–13, 16, 17, 31, 32. v. 23.

A Supplication

O Thou most Righteous, keep us from using Thy name when the word we speak is not Thine, but our own. Let not our wish, our empty hope, deceive our understanding and darken our conscience. Keep us ever in the light of Thy countenance, lest we fall into the snare of our own imaginations. Mercifully bring us to task, if we use Thy name to accredit our own earth-born message, lest we fall into mortal error. Speak, Lord ; Thy servants hear. Amen.

XXII

THE STORMY DAWN OF A NEW DAY

Alas ! for that day *is* great, so that none *is* like it : it *is* even the time of Jacob's trouble ; but he shall be saved out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, *that* I will break his yoke from off his neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him : but they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them. Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD ; neither be dismayed, O Israel : for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity ; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make *him* afraid. For I *am* with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee : though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee : but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished. For thus saith the LORD, Thy bruise *is* incurable, *and* thy wound *is* grievous. *There is* none to plead thy cause, that thou mayest be bound up : thou hast no healing medicines. All thy lovers have forgotten thee ; they seek thee not ; for I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of thine iniquity ; *because* thy sins were increased. Why criest thou for thine affliction ? thy sorrow *is* incurable for the multitude of thine iniquity : *because* thy sins were increased, I have done these things unto thee. Therefore all they that devour thee shall be devoured ; and all thine adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity ; and they that spoil thee shall be a spoil, and all that prey upon thee will I give for a prey. For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD ; because they

called thee an Outcast, *saying*, This *is* Zion, whom no man seeketh after. Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwelling-places; and the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and the palace shall remain after the manner thereof. And out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of them that make merry: and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small. Their children also shall be as aforetime, and their congregation shall be established before me, and I will punish all that oppress them. And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me: for who *is* this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the LORD. And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. At the same time, saith the LORD, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people. Thus saith the LORD, The people *which were* left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; *even* Israel, when I went to cause him to rest. The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, *saying*, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry. Thou shalt yet plant vines upon the mountains of Samaria: the planters shall plant, and shall eat *them* as common things. For there shall be a day, *that* the watchmen upon the mount Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the LORD our God. For thus saith the LORD; Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations: publish ye, praise ye, and say, O LORD, save thy people, the remnant of Israel. Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, *and* with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim *is* my firstborn. . . . Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, *and* bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they *were* not. Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from

weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border. I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself *thus;* Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed *to the yoke:* turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou *art* the LORD my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon *my* thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. *Is* Ephraim my dear son? *is he* a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the LORD. Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps: set thine heart toward the highway, *even* the way *which* thou wentest: turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities. . . . Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; As yet they shall use this speech in the land of Judah and in the cities thereof, when I shall bring again their captivity; The LORD bless thee, O habitation of justice, *and* mountain of holiness. And there shall dwell in Judah itself, and in all the cities thereof together, husbandmen, and they *that* go forth with flocks. For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul.—JER. XXX. 7–22; XXXI. 1–9, 15–21, 23–25.

Jer. xxx. 7–22; xxxi. 1–9, 15–21, 23–25.

"The Day of the Lord."

THE promise of return from captivity grows clearer and more definite. But the furnace of affliction is still in sight, and the cleansing flame still burns high and sometimes fierce. Prophet after prophet kept warning the nation that the "Day of the Lord," which they repeated so glibly and expected to come with glow and song and tranquil hours, as of a shining morning of summer, would be heralded with tempest, and watched in trembling and fear by pale faces. *Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble.* But the end of the long road is full in view; it is

v. 7.

the time of Jacob's trouble, *but he shall be saved out of it.* It comes as a sweeping tempest, with much lightning: but it is lightning for the rain. God will correct Jacob, but the correction will be "with judgement"—exquisitely proportioned to the purposes and ends of Divine mercy. The yoke will be broken from his neck, and his bands burst; the Day of the Lord, dawning in storm, shall noon in clearing skies and widening horizons; *Jacob shall return, and shall be quiet and at ease, and none shall make him afraid. For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee.* When God is with us, what is there too hard?

Jer. xxx. 7–22; xxxi. 1–9, 15–21, 23–25. v. 11. v. 10.

Nevertheless—Little-faith still moodily questions—can these things be? Was not Zion's wound beyond cure, even as the Prophet had reckoned his own wound (xv. 18), and as the people had hopelessly assented (iii. 25; xviii. 12)? Her "lovers," her allies in idolatry, wished to forget her; she had no advocate in the wide world; her judgement was great, but only according to the greatness of her iniquity. God now speaks by the prophet as though He were sorry for having had to chastise her so severely—*I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one.* Such human speech from the Divine lips is designed and well fitted to express His infinite compassion—"as though God were intreating by us." He has wounded deeply: He is sorry: He will make amends.

vv. 12, 13. When God wounds. v. 14. 2 Cor. v. 20.

A kindred thought, in equally emboldened but still reverent terms, is contained in Coventry

Jer. xxx. 7–22; xxxi. 1–9, 15–21, 23–25.

Patmore's *Toys*. There the father of a little boy—"the mother, who was patient, being dead"—is moved to chastise him and send him to bed unkissed, for having "the seventh time disobeyed." Ill at ease, he visits the child's bed for fear he had not slept; but he finds him in deep slumber, though with lashes wet, and his little toys and treasures on a table drawn near the bed, carefully ranged, "to comfort his sad heart."

> So, when that night I prayed
> To God, I wept, and said:
> Ah, when at last we lie with trancèd breath
> Not vexing Thee in death,
> And Thou rememberest of what toys
> We make our joys,
> How weakly understood
> Thy great commanded good,—
> Then, Fatherly not less
> Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the clay,
> Thou'lt leave Thy wrath, and say,
> "I will be sorry for their childishness."

He longs to heal.

God lets them struggle for a while in the meshes of their own snare of despondency. He repeats their own hopeless refrain: *Thy hurt is incurable* (v. 12)—*Thy pain is incurable* (v. 15): true, until the case is brought to God. Her lovers cannot help her—*they seek thee not:* they have no use for a sick ally. But give God a chance—give Him but the least excuse to love and heal thee, and—*I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord.* God was sorry for their childishness, and the misery to which it brought

v. 17.

them, especially when He heard the taunts of those who had destroyed her: *they have called thee an outcast, saying, It is Zion, whom no man seeketh after* [careth for, R.V. margin]. A mother, correcting her child, will take his part if the neighbours begin to pass remarks. God certainly will not leave Jerusalem unpunished; but He will *correct with judgement*, with just measure; and there is no margin for any self-appointed censor to add to His corrections. "Judge not, that ye be not judged." Jer. xxx. 7–22; xxxi. 1–9, 15–21, 23–25. v. 17.

God heals, in order to reconstruct: *Behold, I will turn again the captivity of Jacob's tents . . . and the city shall be builded upon her own heap. . . . Their children also shall be as aforetime, and their congregation shall be established before Me, and I will punish all that oppress them.* They shall have their own native ruler, who will be prince and priest in one. There had been impious kings, like Jeroboam (1 Kings xii. 26–33) and Uzziah (2 Chron. xxvi. 16–20), who had arrogated to themselves approaches to God, to which they had no right, in a mood of undevout religiosity—*Who is he that hath had boldness to approach unto Me?* But it is different when the ruler is a reverent subject of the Supreme Ruler: *I will cause him to draw near, and He shall approach unto Me.* But he will not be lonely in his priestly offices: the nation will become a royal priesthood: *And ye shall be My people, and I will be your God.* It is only natural that these evangelical anticipations should be authenticated in the New Testament (Heb. viii. 10; 2 Cor. vi. 16). Christ hath "made us"—all believers—"to be priests unto God and v. 18. v. 21. A Pure Priesthood.

Jer. xxx. 7–22; xxxi. 1–9, 15–21, 23–25. Chap. XXXI.

His Father," with free access at all times and in all places to Him.

The promise of restoration grows richer and more definite. All Israel is to be included, and "all families" in Israel are to be accounted God's own. There will be a new and purer home-life to make a Church of the nation more real. Babylon is far, but not too far for God's saving arm to reach (xxx. 10, and xxxi. 3, R.V. margin): the Good Shepherd never gives up seeking the lost sheep

Luke xv. 4. "until He find it." In the midst of severe judge-

v. 3. ments the love of God had not once failed: *Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore*

v. 20. *with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.* And later, this idea of unchanging love—

> for ever full
> For ever flowing free,
> For ever shared, for ever whole,
> A never-ebbing sea,—

is again expressed in most beautiful terms: *Is Ephraim My dear son? is he a pleasant child? for as often as I speak against him, I do earnestly remember him still.* God's chastisements prove His nearness; if He strikes, He remembers, to good purpose. The rod is held in the Hand that heals.

Not without Repentance.

These gracious revealings of God's compassion —as though the light of the Parable of the Prodigal Son had gently touched the writer's soul—are neither accidental nor unconditioned. They can only become distinct and legible to the heart softened by penitence. Hardness on our part

arrests the Father's revelation. But the Prophet dwells here with delight on Ephraim's change of heart. The old religious feud between North and South no longer prevails: in the festival joy of reunion, *the watchmen upon the hills of Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the Lord our God.* A fresh song is in the land, and more confident prayer. As in all true revivals, there is a more active missionary spirit at work, affectionate and generous. *Behold I will bring them from the north country*—the regions of the "seething cauldron"—*and gather them from the uttermost parts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall they return thither.* A revival is tested by the depth and breadth of its longing and its seeking, its hunger for souls, its helpfulness to the helpless. *They shall come with weeping*, lamenting the lateness of their return to God. The Prophet had, in the earlier period of his ministry, called up a like vision; but then it was on the bare heights, the scenes of their sinning (iii. 21)—*the weeping and the supplications of the children of Israel; for that they have perverted their way, they have forgotten the Lord their God.* Every prayer was then a tear. In this new vision there is a gladder and fuller note of hope. Not now on "bare heights," but "by rivers of waters" do they walk,—the difference between remorse and repentance; *in a straight way wherein they shall not stumble.* The new heart makes for the "straight way," as naturally as the swallow for the south

Jer. xxx. 7–22; xxxi. 1–9, 15–21, 23–25.

v. 6.

v. 8.

v. 9.

Jer. xxx. 7–22 ; xxxi. 1–9, 15–21, 23–25.

when autumn arrives. God leads them home and leads them well—*with supplications*, their prayers and His Will in glad accord. *For I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn.*

vv. 15, 16.

Penitence and reformation cannot restore everything. Even in the home-coming hour, there is another voice—*Rachel weeping for her children ; she refuseth to be comforted for her children, because they are not.* Armistice morning, November 11, 1918, while it brought inexpressible relief to millions, for others only deepened the sense of their loss, because of their beloved dead that would never return. But in the prophet's mood of hope, even Rachel may find surprises: many whom she has mourned for dead may be found among the home-coming exiles. *And there is hope for thy latter end, saith the Lord ; and thy children shall come again to their own border.*

Grief and Hope.

v. 17.

Underlying all these radiant hopes is a firm conviction of the reality of Ephraim's repentance. *I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a calf unaccustomed to the yoke ; i.e.* "I deserved it all, my own undisciplined will brought it on me": *turn Thou me, and I shall be turned*—a favourite doctrine of the Prophet's, that no soul really turns without God's help, foreshadowing the New Testament teaching concerning the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion.

v. 19.

Surely after that I was turned, I repented—a suggestive if somewhat mystical confession. But it is true that it takes a long time to *finish* repenting. The Prodigal Son, even after he had partaken of his father's feast—rather,

because of it—would feel keener regret for all he had done and all he had been. Jer. xxx. 7–22;

The personal joy of the penitent is kept fresh by the hope and belief that he is preparing the way for many to follow. A soul saved is at once filled with the desire that others may be saved. Andrew "findeth first his own brother Simon. . . . Philip findeth Nathanael" (John i. 41, 45). So Ephraim is to set up way-marks and guide-posts, that those who may have tarried behind may, later, find the homeward way; and, encouraged by seeing them, pursue their course toward the high way. "The men with the pilgrim heart"—as Dr. McFadyen has translated Ps. lxxxiv. 56—will be cheered by the signs of other pilgrims who have passed on before, travelling Zionward. When all have reached Jerusalem and helped to restore it people will stand in awe mingled with joy and *use this speech in the land of Judah. . . . The Lord bless thee, O habitation of justice, O mountain of holiness.* God, in righteous judgment, had to commit His "mountain in the field" to the spoil, because of a nation's sin; but now, as the homestead of social justice and personal holiness, it shall be fit for God to bless. *For I have satiated the weary soul, and every sorrowful soul have I replenished.* When men return to the Fountain of living waters, God never withholds His pardon and His peace.

xxxi. 1–9, 15–21, 23–25. The Pioneer's Privilege. v. 21. v. 23. xvii. 3. v. 25.

An Application

"There is no hope"—"Incurable." The thought had oppressed the people and made their return to

Jer. xxx. 7–22; xxxi. 1–9, 15–21, 23–25. xxx. 12, 15. God more difficult (ii. 25; xviii. 12). It had even touched the heart of the Prophet himself, though he used it in another way (xv. 18). And now when there is a real desire and longing to return to God, it stands again in their way. God takes it from their lips and repeats it, not in order to dishearten them, but to impress upon them the cost of their redemption, and the miracle of grace. "There is no hope—apart from Me; thy wound is incurable—until thou callest Me in to cure it." The sinner's sense of hopelessness is the dawning of redeeming grace. Our incurableness shuts us in to one way and one door—the door of the Good Physician. When we have really found ourselves to be without hope in the world, there is a good chance of our finding "Jesus Christ Who is our hope."

1 Tim. i. 1.

A Supplication

Our Heavenly Father, Thou hast loved us with an everlasting love, and Thou hast no desire to give up loving us, or else our unfaithfulness would have quenched Thy love. Our hope of Heaven is not in our love to Thee, but in Thy love toward us. So great a love will not let us go, even though we struggle, in our rebelliousness of will, to loosen Thy hold. And now, Lord, more and more, *draw* us with Thy lovingkindness. So sanctify our will, that we shall be more drawn than held—and yet do not loosen Thy hold, for we are erring and foolish. Thy love is our safety. Amen.

xxxi. 20.

XXIII

THE NEW COVENANT

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Put your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat flesh. For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: but this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels *and* in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward. Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending *them:* yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers. . . . And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit *it;* neither shall *that* be done any more. At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart. . . . Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; As yet they shall use this speech in the land of Judah and in the cities thereof, when I shall bring again their captivity; The LORD bless thee, O habitation of justice, *and* mountain of holiness. And there shall dwell in Judah itself, and in all the cities thereof together, husbandmen, and they *that* go forth with flocks. For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul. Upon

this I awaked, and beheld; and my sleep was sweet unto me. . . . In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt: (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD:) But this *shall* be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.—JER. VII. 21–26; III. 16, 17; XXXI. 23–26, 29–34.

Jer. vii. 21–26; iii. 16, 17; xxxi. 23–26, 29–34. "Prize of the High Calling."

JEREMIAH, bravely treading his dolorous way, reached a Divine goal. His puritanic fire, his unflinching fidelity to his unacceptable mission, his nobleness of soul, even his disappointments and mental agonies, helped him to arrive. He himself, probably, never knew on earth how much he had accomplished; do we yet know? At any rate our estimate has grown clearer.

No, it must fall out
That one whose labour perfects any work
Shall rise from it with eye so worn that he
Of all men least can measure the extent
Of what he has accomplished. He alone
Who, nothing tasked, is nothing weary too,
May clearly scan the little he effects:
But we, the bystanders, untouched by toil,
Estimate each aright.

One is tempted to revise Browning and say not those "untouched by toil," but rather the very sons of other toil have learnt how to estimate aright. Jer. vii. 21–26; iii. 16, 17; xxxi. 23–26, 29–34.

There are waymarks, which predict arrival, along the road which the Prophet had travelled. The startling outburst in chap. vii. (21–26)—whatever historical difficulties are involved in the explanation of it—is clear in its puritanic note. *For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: but this thing I commanded them, saying, Hearken unto My voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be My people.* The statement, at the least, establishes the unqualified supremacy of the moral law over any ritual, however costly or ornate. "The Lord denies with good reason," says Orelli, "that He has commanded sacrifices in the sense which the people thought, independently of deep, internal conditions" (cp. 1 Sam. xv. 22; Hos. vi. 6). God preferred an obedient people to a ritualistic people; for ritual tends everywhere to capture and hold the primary position, instead of remaining in its proper secondary place.

Obedience First.

Less startling, but not less suggestive, is an earlier reference made by the Prophet to the Ark, in a glowing picture of the restoration—political and spiritual. *In those days, saith the Lord, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord; neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it* [miss it, R.V. margin]; *neither shall that be done any more*

Passing of the Ark. iii. 16, 17.

Jer. vii. 21–26 ; iii. 16, 17 ; xxxi. 23–26, 29–34.

[shall it be made any more, R.V. margin]. The ancient ark will have perished ; no new ark will be made to take its place. "There is a curious irony," remarks Dr. Peake, "in the story of 2 Macc. ii. 4 ff. that Jeremiah hid the ark in a cave on Mount Nebo, together with the tabernacle and altar of incense—Jeremiah, of all people!" But he is no mere iconoclast : the ark would not be needed, because the Lord would fill all Jerusalem ; He would be the God of every home and every individual. Jerusalem, filled with the glorious light of His presence, would become the meeting-place of all nations—as though a brief but thrilling glimpse of the more spiritual vision of the New Jerusalem of the Apocalypse had been vouchsafed the Prophet. Forgetting the things which were behind, he was pressing toward the mark.

Rev. xxi. 24.

Jerusalem made New.

xxxi. vv. 31–34.

With these and such way-marks and guide-posts to help us, we come to the Prophet's great spiritual contribution—universal and for all time—of the conception of the New Covenant. In the history of man's religious quest, it still stands, a shining imperishable landmark. He sees his backsliding, idol-stained Jerusalem becoming a cleansed, earnest, holy city in the midst of Judah's cities ; and people that approach and see it shall say : *The Lord bless thee, O habitation of justice, O mountain of holiness.* There is a pastoral scene before his eyes of plenty and quiet, of ploughmen and shepherds singing at their tasks.

v. 23.

v. 26.

Upon this I awaked, and beheld ; and my sleep was sweet unto me. Probably, the reference is not to

natural sleep, but to the restful withdrawal of the soul and its untroubled stay among consolatory ideals. After waking, the future vision still holds him, for God reassures him: *Like as I have watched over them to pluck up and to break down . . . so will I watch over them to build and to plant, saith the Lord.* Among new social and moral conditions, a new and better mind will flourish, and unwholesome heresies shall pass away: *In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.* Jeremiah does not altogether dismiss the proverb as though it contained no element of truth; what he objects to is the abuse of its truth. It is doubtful if any theory has been more abused, then or now, than the theory of heredity, by clumsy handling. Delicate restraint is as necessary to its right elucidation as the collecting and sifting of data. Jeremiah insists that the individual can only be morally guilty on the ground of his own sin: *Every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.* In God's realm of ultimate justice there will be no confusion of guilt, and therefore no one shall suffer wrong.

Jer. vii. 21–26; iii. 16, 17; xxxi. 23–26, 29–34. v. 28. v. 29. An Abused Proverb. v. 30.

In this tranquil air what revelation may not appear!—what vision of past or future may not luminously construct itself!

> Hence, in a season of calm weather
> Though inland far we be,
> Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
> Which brought us hither,
> Can in a moment travel thither.

Jer. vii. 21–26 ; iii. 16, 17 ; xxxi. 23–26, 29–34. vv. 31–33.

Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah (the re-united nation) : *not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. . . . But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord ; I will put My law in their inward parts and in their heart will I write it ; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

In the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews in dealing with the "Better Covenant" quotes these verses, with the comment that had the first Covenant been faultless, "then would no place have been sought for a second." But not only, in the orderly progress of Revelation, was the Covenant imperfect in itself, but God also "found fault" with the people, that they did not rise to the best that was in it. It was meant to be preparatory ; but "in that He saith, A new covenant, He hath made the first old."

Heb. viii. 7–13.

The first was imperfect because, as Dr. T. Charles Edwards remarks, "there was no preparation arranged in it to keep the people faithful to its conditions. But in the New Covenant there is an All-sufficient Mediator and better promises ; and, among these, the promise to put His law in the mind and heart of the people and to forgive their iniquities. . . . 'In their mind,' no longer in an ark ; 'in their hearts,' no longer on tables of stone."

From outward observances, however seemly and

devout, religion passes into the innermost spirit of man, interweaving itself livingly with the will, the understanding, the affections, the whole personality. All this became clear to Jeremiah: what has become clearer still to us, through the Christian revelation, is that what so works in the innermost man, is not a law in words, but a living Person—"Christ in you, the hope of glory." Jer. vii. 21–26; iii. 16, 17; xxxi. 23–26, 29–34. Col. i. 27.

The writer of the Epistle found himself in a situation similar in its forebodings of disaster to that of Jeremiah. Jerusalem was again threatened, not by the power from the North, but from the West—Rome, not Babylon. But the calamity threatened to be equally devastating, socially, politically, and religiously. Religion, in its outward property and supplies, would be bankrupt. What would be left? For Jeremiah and the apostolic seer—and for the seeking souls of all ages and countries—a living inner temple, which would stand indestructible in all the catastrophes of time. Men would find in themselves an inner temple, an interior castle, safe from attack. "Quite freed from all the hamper of artificial religion, which is worn out and passing away, they may enjoy real forgiveness and enter really into the presence of God. The New Covenant of the heart is now being realised. Only it is a Covenant. There must be an answer to the movement of God" (Nairne, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. ciii.).

I will be their God, in the fullness of redeeming love; the human answer to that "movement of God" must be—*they shall be My people:* they will

Jer. vii. 21–26; iii. 16, 17; xxxi. 23–26, 29–34.

not prove faithless and forsake Me, but own Me, fully and gladly. Each individual conscience shall, through "affectionate understanding" of God's laws, have its own holy lamp lit within, so that *they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them, unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord*—*i.e.* experience will take the place of hearsay. In a sense every saint will be for ever both teacher and taught—to the end that ye may be "strong to *apprehend with all the saints* what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth." The lesson will not end as merely a lesson, but will lead to such personal apprehension, that each soul will appropriate enough of God to live on Him for ever.

Eph. iii. 17–19.

xxxii. 17, 18.

For a sinful soul, for a sin-laden nation, is not this too bright a hope? The Prophet himself, in another connection, supplies the answer—*There is nothing too hard for Thee, which shewest mercy unto thousands.* God has made forgiveness His business; and every moment of the day of grace He is seeking to extend the business. The New Covenant, which is to abide for ever, must be clean on both sides, a holy bride for the Perfect Husband; therefore, to secure this, *I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more* (cp. Eph. v. 25–27).

Rev. xii. 16.

The Order of Nature.

xxxi. 35–37.

Let the earth help the woman. Whenever the Church, weary and faint on her time-long pilgrimage, is assailed with doubt of the end, let her, through her children's eyes, look up to the azure sky, and watch the unbroken succession of day and

night, the orderly timing of the phases of the moon, the silent, harmonious march of the starry host, and say to herself, "My Lord keeps watch always." Or should clouds and darkness cover the sky, let her stand on the sounding shore, listening to the roar of the angry waves, and say, "My Lord rules the storm." *If these ordinances depart from before Me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me.* Heaven above, with all the progress of science, still remains unmeasured, the foundations of the earth have not yet been searched out beneath; therefore the hope of the Jewish nation is still in date. "Now if their fall is the riches of the world . . . how much more their fulness!"

Jer. vii. 21–26; iii. 16, 17; xxxi. 23–26, 29–34.

Rom. xi. 12, 26–27.

An Application

To have reached the spiritual goal where Jeremiah arrived was worth all the checks and agonies of the long journeys. Had he been less a man of sorrows, he would have probably been less a prophet of truth in its transparent purity. At the end of one of the lyrics of his darkest hour, from bitterly cursing his enemy, there is a sudden and inexplicable change: "Sing unto the Lord, praise ye the Lord: for He hath delivered the soul of the needy from the hand of evil-doers." Knowing how the Prophet revised his own work, and added to it, may it not be that this verse was added in some final revision? And if so, possibly after reaching the highest mount of vision here? The ill will of enemies does no longer count to the man who has gazed into the

xx. 13.

Jer. vii. 21–26 ; iii. 16, 17 ; xxxi. 23–26, 29–34.

crystal depths of spiritual truth. The man who has found the treasure in the field has no time to think of the thorns in the hedge, which wounded him as he came through.

A Supplication

O Lord of light, cleanse our hearts that Thy law of love may be fitly written within. In its state of unforgiven sin, it is not fit for such a holy scripture. Make it pure, and write. Make the writing very clear, and if it become faint, write again the same words of eternal life. Let all we do and say testify to the power of the inner law. May the anointing of Thy Holy Spirit so abide in us that we need not that any one should teach us. Amen.

1 John ii. 27.

XXIV

THE SIGN OF THE PURCHASED FIELD

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which *was* the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar. For then the king of Babylon's army besieged Jerusalem: and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the prison, which *was* in the king of Judah's house. For Zedekiah king of Judah had shut him up, saying, Wherefore dost thou prophesy, and say, Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it; and Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him mouth to mouth, and his eyes shall behold his eyes; and he shall lead Zedekiah to Babylon, and there shall he be until I visit him, saith the LORD: though ye fight with the Chaldeans, ye shall not prosper. And Jeremiah said, The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Behold, Hanameel the son of Shallum thine uncle shall come unto thee, saying, Buy thee my field that *is* in Anathoth: for the right of redemption *is* thine to buy *it*. So Hanameel mine uncle's son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the LORD, and said unto me, Buy my field, I pray thee, that *is* in Anathoth, which *is* in the country of Benjamin: for the right of inheritance *is* thine, and the redemption *is* thine; buy *it* for thyself. Then I knew that this *was* the word of the LORD. And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle's son, that *was* in Anathoth, and weighed him the money, *even* seventeen shekels of silver. And I subscribed the evidence, and sealed *it*, and took witnesses, and weighed *him* the money in the balances. So I took the evidence of the purchase, *both* that which was sealed *according*

to the law and custom, and that which was open: and I gave the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, in the sight of Hanameel mine uncle's *son*, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the book of the purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison. And I charged Baruch before them, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Take these evidences, this evidence of the purchase, both which is sealed, and this evidence which is open; and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days. For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land. Now when I had delivered the evidence of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, I prayed unto the LORD, saying, Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, *and* there is nothing too hard for thee: Thou shewest lovingkindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the LORD of hosts, *is* his name. Great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes *are* open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings: which hast set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, *even* unto this day, and in Israel, and among *other* men; and hast made thee a name, as at this day; and hast brought forth thy people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs, and with wonders, and with a strong hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with terror; and hast given them this land, which thou didst swear to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey; and they came in, and possessed it; but they obeyed not thy voice, neither walked in thy law; they have done nothing of all that thou commandedst them to do: therefore thou hast caused all this evil to come upon them: behold the mounts, they are come unto the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans, that fight against it, because of the sword, and of the famine, and of the pestilence: and what thou hast spoken is come to pass; and, behold, thou seest *it*. And thou hast said unto me, O Lord GOD, Buy thee the field for money, and take witnesses; for the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans. Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah, saying, Behold, I *am* the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me? Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will give this city into the hand

of the Chaldeans, and into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and he shall take it: . . . Because of all the evil of the children of Israel and of the children of Judah, which they have done to provoke me to anger, they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, and the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And they have turned unto me the back, and not the face: though I taught them, rising up early and teaching *them*, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction. . . . And now therefore thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city, whereof ye say, It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence; Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: and I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul. . . . Moreover the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah the second time, while he was yet shut up in the court of the prison, saying, Thus saith the LORD the maker thereof, the LORD that formed it, to establish it; the LORD *is* his name; Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not. For thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city, and concerning the houses of the kings of Judah, which are thrown down by the mounts, and by the sword; they come to fight with the Chaldeans, but *it is* to fill them with the dead bodies of men, whom I have slain in mine anger and in my fury, and for all whose wickedness I have hid my face from this city. Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth. And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first. And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me. And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour

before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them : and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it. Thus saith the LORD ; Again there shall be heard in this place, which ye say *shall be* desolate without man and without beast, *even* in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man, and without inhabitant, and without beast, the voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the LORD of hosts : for the LORD *is* good ; for his mercy *endureth* for ever : *and* of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the LORD. . . . Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David ; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely : and this *is the name*, wherewith she shall be called. The LORD our righteousness. . . . And the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD ; If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season ; *then* may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne ; and with the Levites the priests, my ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured : so will I multiply the seed of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me. . . . *This is* the word that came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people which *were* at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty unto them ; That every man should let his manservant, and every man his maidservant, *being* an Hebrew or an Hebrewess, go free ; that none should serve himself of them, *to wit*, of a Jew his brother. Now when all the princes, and all the people, which had entered into the covenant, heard that every one should let his manservant, and every one his maidservant, go free, that none should serve themselves of them any more, then they obeyed, and let *them* go. But afterward they turned, and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids.

The Sign of the Purchased Field

Therefore the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondmen, saying, At the end of seven years let ye go every man his brother an Hebrew, which hath been sold unto thee; and when he hath served thee six years, thou shalt let him go free from thee: but your fathers hearkened not unto me, neither inclined their ear. And ye were now turned, and had done right in my sight, in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbour; and ye had made a covenant before me in the house which is called by my name: but ye turned and polluted my name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom he had set at liberty at their pleasure, to return, and brought them into subjection, to be unto you for servants and for handmaids. Therefore thus saith the LORD; Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the LORD, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. And I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof, the princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, which passed between the parts of the calf; I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of them that seek their life: and their dead bodies shall be for meat unto the fowls of the heaven, and to the beasts of the earth.—JER. XXXII. 1–28, 32, 33, 36–41; XXXIII. 1–11, 14–16, 19–22; XXXIV. 8–20.

THE siege of Jerusalem lasted two years; and from the first Jeremiah foresaw and foretold the end—unless true national repentance should intervene to avert it. Two years of siege meant famine, pestilence, and the unsleeping sword. *Death is come up into our windows, it is entered into our palaces; to cut off the children from without, and the young men from the streets.*

Jer. xxxii. 1–28, 32, 33, 36–41. ix. 21.

Jer. xxxii. 1–28, 32, 33, 36–41.

God and Business.

Jeremiah was in the "court of the guard," a prisoner, partly befriended by Zedekiah. There came to him a strange Divine intimation. A field at Anathoth in the family possession was for sale. "If land was, or was about to be, sold, the nearest of kin was bound to purchase or re-purchase it as the case might be (*see* Lev. xxv. 24, 25; Ruth iv. 6), so that land should not pass from one family to another." The land in question must have been within 2,000 cubits of the city (Num. xxxv. 5)—*i.e.* about 3,000 feet. Jeremiah was cousin to the vendor, Hanameel, and the right of redemption was his. Hanameel visited him in prison, and offered it to him. The offer was accepted, the seventeen shekels weighed, the deed of purchase signed and duly witnessed. Then Baruch was charged to place the deed securely in an earthen jar to preserve it for many days. For the transaction was to become an allegory of hope. *For thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall yet again be bought in this land.* For those already in exile and those now suffering siege and about to go into exile, it was an earnest of return and re-occupation.

v. 15.

vv. 16–25. Prayer and Business.

The transaction had a reflex action upon himself: it led him anew to prayer. He addresses God as the Maker of heaven and earth, to Whom *there is nothing too hard.* He recalls God's mercy and judgement, *great in counsel, and mighty in work;* he contemplates God's omniscience, *whose eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men.* He comes home to his own country and people, and acknowledges the

clear finger of God in their history from their exodus out of Egypt, but has also to confess the nation's frequent desertions from God—*they obeyed not Thy voice, neither walked in Thy law.* And even while he prayed, the "mounts" of the Chaldean besiegers—heaps of earth and hewn timber—were almost up to the walls. As though he were talking man to man he wonders what excuse an omniscient God can furnish—for *behold, Thou seest it.* And yet on the eve of the city's destruction God has charged him to buy a field! Is He not looking on?

Jer. xxxii. 1–28, 32, 33, 36–41.

The revelation comes, as usual, through the gate of his sorrow: *Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for Me?* If He is the God of *all* flesh, Babylon as well as Jerusalem is His; and He can work there as here to accomplish His will. But once again God states His case against the entire nation, Israel as well as Judah, for having provoked Him to anger from their youth with the work of their hands. Their houses, which are now to be burnt, had lent their roofs for offering incense to Baal: what other fate were fitting? *They have turned unto Me the back, and not the face* (cp. John vi. 66). The abominations which they had impiously set in the Temple had defiled it; and the children's agonies from the fires of Molech in the Valley of Hinnom had sobbed in heaven for vengeance.

v. 26.

But even now in the hour of judgement God's correction is by just measure. When the severe discipline has borne fruit in the amendment of the nation's ways, Mercy shall have its new morning

vv. 36–41. Fear and Religion.

Jer. xxxii. 1–28, 32, 33, 36–41.

and day of grace, and the surviving remnants shall be gathered from all lands and brought back to their country; *and they shall be My people, and I will be their God: and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me for ever.* No longer an altar for every street in Jerusalem, and a god in every city of Judah, and a nation's soul divided and out of tune with God's holy law and will—no longer that, but "*one* heart and *one* way." *I will put My fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from Me.* A religion that retains a living element of reverent fear is safer to last than a religion without any fear. In the backsliding, idol-bound nation God had great sorrow: in regenerate hearts God has great joy. *I will rejoice over them to do them good.* The "joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" is the Father's joy mirrored in pure angelic souls. Let therefore Jeremiah's purchase remain as a pledge of the exile's return to repossess the land.

Chap. XXXIII. The Invisible Ruler.

These were the Divine promises and pledges; in the meanwhile the cruel siege proceeded. But that also, as a part of the Divine purpose, is Divinely overruled. Let not Jeremiah's faith fail, when the mystery of suffering would grow still more perplexing: God as the Hearer of prayer is always within reach. *Call unto Me, and I will answer thee, and will shew thee great things, and difficult, which thou knowest not.* Things "difficult"—or "fenced in" as it may be rendered—are the guarded secrets of God (Deut. xxix. 29; Mark xiii.

32, 33). The besieged are pulling down their houses to strengthen the defence of the walls against the piling up of the Chaldean mounds; but all too late—the hour of black doom has struck. Let them make their escape by faith into the realm of future hope; God will again bring *health and cure, with abundance of peace and truth;* for truth *is* both healing and peace. The health promised will be wholesomeness of soul, through a cleansing from all iniquity, a full pardon all of grace. So Jerusalem shall become to God a *name of joy, for a praise and for a glory, before all the nations of the earth.* The deepening of the calamity makes the missionary note firmer and more sustained. In the restored people the whole human family is to be blessed (Gen. xviii. 18).

Jer. xxxiii. 1–11, 14–16, 19–22.

We can almost watch the reddening of the Messianic dawn in the sky, as the Prophet keeps his gaze to the future. Jerusalem no longer publishes the shame of its desolation to every passer-by; it pulsates with prosperous, well-ruled life, with wedding joy, and the choral rapture of great psalms—*Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for His mercy endureth for ever.* In such a purified air of devotion, sacrifices of thanksgiving can have their place and a sincere ritual be maintained. How (as compared with vi. 20; vii. 21–24) should the Prophet look with favouring eye on these? Perhaps because pure devotion can use forms without abusing them.

v. 11.

In such warm climate of faith, nothing is too hard for God—not even the gift of His own Son as

vv. 14–18.

Jer. xxxiii. 1–11, 14–16, 19–22.

Messiah. The first vision of the Prophet was of an almond-tree budding while all around was winter—and our earliest visions of the truths that matter haunt us through life—so the Prophet, halting now at the mountains of twilight, saw the Branch—for the second time (*see* xxiii. 5) ; a Branch of righteousness, from David's root. *He shall execute judgement and righteousness in the land*, so that the name of Jerusalem shall be, *The Lord is our righteousness.* It has been pointed out that in the first vision of the Branch, this is the name applied to the King from the house of David. But this is preparatory to the great fulfilment : " Him Who knew no sin He made to be Sin on our behalf ; that we might become the righteousness of God in Him " ; " We know that . . . we shall be like Him. . . . And every one that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."

The Branch that shall not Wither.

2 Cor. v. 21.

1 John iii. 2, 3.

In such surroundings, with the state and throne of Judah trembling and tottering to ruin, what a miracle of hope ! what an auroral outshining of Divine mercy ! We can still praise God to-day for having pity on His sorely tried servant—" I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath." In the thunder-laden gloom God gave him the Morning Star.

Lam. iii. 1.

vv. 19–22.

To help his faith and the faith of those that deigned to listen to the message, God pointed once more to His covenant of day-and-night. Had there—or has there—ever been a night, however black its gloom, however wild its sky with storm, when morning failed to follow ? If there had been,

then His covenant of King-and-Priest might also be broken—but not before! Jer. xxxiii. 1–11, 14–16, 19–22.

> O when His wisdom can mistake,
> His might decay, His love forsake,
> Then may His children cease to sing—
> "The Lord Omnipotent is King."

In very truth, Jeremiah had much need to be fortified from above. Chapter xxxiv. records a disgraceful incident of the siege, which might well give one utter despair of human nature. In the first stage of the siege the king, his princes and all owners of slaves had suddenly remembered or given heed to a merciful Levitical ordinance, and freed their own Hebrew slaves. They had made it a solemn religious act by passing between the parts of a calf cut in twain, and confirming the covenant in the Temple itself. But it was only panic piety. When the Chaldeans temporarily withdrew, these temporary philanthropists cancelled the covenant of freedom, *and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection* again. The callousness of it all, made more horrible by the religious hypocrisy included in it, is more shuddering when we recall that it is by no means a solecism in the records of our fallen race; especially in the ebb and flow of a great crisis. Men in the reaction from terror become hard and cruel.

Chap. xxxiv. xxxiv. 8–20. v. 18. v. 15.

An Application

There is nothing too hard for Thee. The words have a wide and perpetual application, as deep as vv. 17, 27.

Jer. xxxiv. 8–20.

all depths, as high as all heights, wide as the need of all created beings. It is hard to raise a fallen world; but not too hard for God. It is hard to give an Only-begotten Son to die for fierce enemies; but not too hard for God. It is hard to bring the pilgrim, who frequently falls and strays, safely home; but not too hard for God. It is hard to bear with the mistakes and infirmities and neglects of the saints; but *not* too hard for God.

A Supplication

O Thou Faithful and True, help us to purchase what we can keep in the darkest storm, and afterwards. As the field of Anathoth remained through the siege and the seventy long years of exile, and was still there when the exiles returned, so grant that the young may in early life buy what will outlast all the trials and crosses of their earthly pilgrimage, and after the term of three score years and ten still survive. Grant that we may all possess the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, which our Heavenly Kinsman has secured for us. Amen.

XXV

THE RECHABITE WITNESS

The word which came unto Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, saying, Go unto the house of the Rechabites, and speak unto them, and bring them into the house of the LORD, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink. Then I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habaziniah, and his brethren, and all his sons, and the whole house of the Rechabites; and I brought them into the house of the LORD, into the chamber of the sons of Hanan, the son of Igdaliah, a man of God, which *was* by the chamber of the princes, which *was* above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the keeper of the door: and I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites pots full of wine, and cups, and I said unto them, Drink ye wine. But they said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, *neither* ye, nor your sons for ever: neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have *any:* but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land where ye *be* strangers. Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he hath charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, nor our daughters; nor to build houses for us to dwell in: neither have we vineyard, nor field, nor seed: but we have dwelt in tents, and have obeyed, and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us. But it came to pass, when Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon came up into the land, that we said, Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans, and for fear of the army of the Syrians: so we dwell at Jerusalem. Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Go and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants

of Jerusalem, Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my words? saith the LORD. The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are performed; for unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment: notwithstanding I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but ye hearkened not unto me. I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending *them*, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers: but ye have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me. Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them; but this people hath not hearkened unto me: Therefore thus saith the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them: because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered. And Jeremiah said unto the house of the Rechabites, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you: therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever. —JER. XXXV. 1–19.

Jer. xxxv. 1–19. Tribal Piety. 1 Chron. ii. 55.

THE introduction of the Rechabites serves to show that there was in Judah a minority faithful to Jehovah, and therefore in partial sympathy, at least, with the Prophet and his puritan zeal. They were a branch of the Kenites: their master Jonadab had aided Jehu in utterly destroying Ahab's idolatrous house. Their tribal pledge compelled them to abstain from wine, to build no house, to sow no seed, to plant no vineyard: they were to dwell in tents for all time. It was not agreement with their tenets that drew Jeremiah to them, but

admiration for their loyalty. The pressure of invasion—the seething cauldron of the North—had compelled them to leave the open fields, and find refuge within the walls of Jerusalem, where they could still find spaces for pitching their tents and so avoid dwelling in houses. Had they dishonoured the ancestral pledge in this or any other part of it, they would have been of no use to Jeremiah as an object-lesson in filial obedience. He was so sure of their loyalty that he could risk tempting them, in a temple chamber, by offering the heads of the clan bowls full of wine, and cups: *and I said unto them, Drink ye wine.* But they instantly and peremptorily refused, and explained the rules by which they lived: *we have dwelt in tents, and have obeyed, and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us.*

Jer. xxxv. 1–19.

vv. 5–11.

In their punctilious obedience he had found what he needed—something definite and firm to contrast with Judah's disloyalty to God. If such obedience was heartily given to the words of a human father, did not Israel's Divine Father deserve as much? *The words of Jonadab . . . are performed;* but—*ye have not hearkened unto Me.* A succession of devoted prophets, *rising up early and speaking,* had pleaded with them: *Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them.* But Jonadab had better children than God. And so yet, children who are good sons and daughters to their parents ought to make us ask if we show such filial respect to our Heavenly Father. "If then I be a father,

vv. 12–17. God's Complaint.

Mal. i. 6.

Jer. xxxv. 1–19. where is Mine honour?" "It is a thing to be justly complained of, and lamented," remarks Matthew Henry, "that God is so little feared and honoured even by those that own Him for their Father and Master."

vv. 18, 19. For the dutiful children of Jonadab, Jeremiah had a glad promise: *Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before Me for ever.* Without making too much of mere literalism, it is interesting to mention later references to the survival of this clan. "Eusebius mentions 'priests of the house of Rechab,' and Benjamin of Tudela, a Jewish traveller of the twelfth century, states that he met with them in Arabia. More recent travellers have thought that they discovered the descendants of Rechab amongst the nomads in Arabia or the Peninsula of Sinai that still practised the old ancestral customs." * But as Professor Bennett wisely adds: "The fidelity of Jehovah to His promises does not depend upon our unearthing obscure tribes in distant deserts." What is of higher value for all time is that lives of self-control, of natural piety and genuine simplicity, make for healthy strength and moral permanence.

vv. 12–17. For the piously obedient, a bright promise; but for stiff-necked, God-neglecting Judah another signal of doom: *Behold, I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them: because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard; and I*

* W. H. Bennett: *The Book of Jeremiah*, vol. ii. (in "The Expositor's Bible"), p. 53.

have called unto them, but they have not answered. Jer. xxxv. 1–19.
So does our Lord pronounce judgement, in the Parable of the Great Supper (Luke xiv. 16–24), upon those who were invited and made excuses not to come.

An Application

In verse 4, Hanan is mentioned, and described as "the man of God." He permitted the Prophet the use of his chamber. That is all we know of him. He may have been a prophet and a teacher of prophets: by his "sons" may have been meant his disciples. But it is all uncertain. His character, however, is clearly expressed in the definite appellation—"*the* man of God." He dwelt much in the Temple, the centre of hostility to Jeremiah and his ministry; he therefore risked much in lending him his chamber, that is, he lived up to the character of a man of God. His history begins and ends there: one day in his life, such as gave Browning the conception of *Pippa Passes*—"some one walking alone through life. too obscure to leave a trace of his or her passage," till the one day, out of the long years, brings the opportunity, and use is faithfully made of it.

A Supplication

O Lord of love, Who hast Thyself made the ordinance of the human family, guard the sanctities of the hearth in these days. Teach all fathers and mothers to be wise in counsel and winsome in

Jer. xxxv. 1–19.

example, through the gentleness of Thy Holy Spirit. Teach all children to honour their parents, give heed to prudent instruction, and keep to the good way, through the strength of Thy Holy Spirit. Build Thy Church in beauty, out of beautiful homes, and hearts bound to each other and to Thee in holy affection. Amen.

XXVI

BURNT—BUT NOT CONSUMED

And it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, *that* this word came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day. It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin. Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah: and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD, which he had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book. And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, I *am* shut up; I cannot go into the house of the LORD: therefore go thou, and read in the roll, which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the LORD in the ears of the people in the LORD'S house upon the fasting day: and also thou shalt read them in the ears of all Judah that come out of their cities. It may be they will present their supplication before the LORD, and will return every one from his evil way: for great *is* the anger and the fury that the LORD hath pronounced against this people. And Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading in the book the words of the LORD in the LORD'S house. And it came to pass in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, in the ninth month, *that* they proclaimed a fast before the LORD to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people that came from the cities of Judah unto Jerusalem. Then read Baruch in the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of the LORD, in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the higher court, at the entry of the new gate of the LORD'S house,

in the ears of all the people. When Michaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, had heard out of the book all the words of the LORD, then he went down into the king's house, into the scribe's chamber: and, lo, all the princes sat there, *even* Elishama, the scribe, and Delaiah the son of Shemaiah, and Elnathan the son of Achbor, and Gemariah the son of Shaphan, and Zedekiah the son of Hananiah, and all the princes. Then Michaiah declared unto them all the words that he had heard, when Baruch read the book in the ears of the people. Therefore all the princes sent Jehudi the son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi, unto Baruch, saying, Take in thine hand the roll wherein thou hast read in the ears of the people, and come. So Baruch the son of Neriah took the roll in his hand, and came unto them. And they said unto him, Sit down now, and read it in our ears. So Baruch read *it* in their ears. Now it came to pass, when they had heard all the words, they were afraid both one and other, and said unto Baruch, We will surely tell the king of all these words. And they asked Baruch, saying, Tell us now, How didst thou write all these words at his mouth? Then Baruch answered them, He pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth, and I wrote *them* with ink in the book. Then said the princes unto Baruch, Go hide thee, thou and Jeremiah; and let no man know where ye be. And they went in to the king into the court, but they laid up the roll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and told all the words in the ears of the king. So the king sent Jehudi to fetch the roll: and he took it out of Elishama the scribe's chamber. And Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes which stood beside the king. Now the king sat in the winter-house in the ninth month: and *there was a fire* on the hearth burning before him. And it came to pass, *that* when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast *it* into the fire that *was* on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that *was* on the hearth. Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, *neither* the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words. Nevertheless Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah had made intercession to the king that he would not burn the roll: but he would not hear them. But the king commanded Jerahmeel the son of Hammelech, and Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel, to take Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet: but the LORD hid them. Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, after that the

king had burned the roll, and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah, saying, Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned. And thou shalt say to Jehoiakim king of Judah, Thus saith the LORD; Thou hast burned this roll, saying, Why hast thou written therein, saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast? Therefore thus saith the LORD of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them; but they hearkened not. Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words.—JER. XXXVI. 1–32.

THE narrative in these chapters is as graphic as it is mournful. The Prophet has still, Abdiel-like, to maintain, single, against revolted kings, princes, and multitudes, the cause of truth, Jer. xxxvi. 1–32.

in word mightier than they in arms.

Alone—yet not Alone.

The priest in the Temple is deaf to God's message; the time-serving prophet has his home and his wages, but is estranged from God. This lonely man, persecuted and imprisoned, listens-in, receives and reports what the Lord saith. The words are spoken "against" people—against Israel, against Judah, against all the nations: Athanasius against the world. But there is still a lingering wistful hope: *It may be the house of Judah will hear . . . that they may return every man from his evil way.* v. 3.

Jer. xxxvi. 1–32. If he were only given his liberty he would again plead with them; but—*I am shut up; I cannot go into the house of the Lord.* So he dictates his message to Baruch, who writes it verbatim on a roll, and on a national fast-day reads it in the Temple, in Gemariah's chamber, in the ears of all the people. Gemariah's son, when he had heard the words, hastened to the royal house, and reported to the princes what he had heard. They became interested and sent for Baruch and his roll. He came, and the reading of it greatly disturbed them. They wished to inform the king, but were afraid—afraid for Jeremiah's life, and perhaps afraid for their own safety also, knowing their king. They hid Baruch and his roll, and then sought audience of the king sitting in his winter-house, before a fire. The king would hear the reading of the roll: so a royal servant was sent to fetch it, and he read it. When he had got through three or four leaves, the king took his pen-knife, cut the read portion and burnt them in the brazier; and so, portion by portion, *until all the roll was consumed;* and no doubt thought how grandly a king could jest! The princes, dismayed at the first reading, now fell into the royal humour: by this time, *they were not afraid, nor rent their garments.* The ears of the shallow grow so quickly accustomed to the repetition of even words of doom. Three only of the princely audience were still disturbed, and pleaded—in vain—with the king not to burn the roll. He finished burning it and then ordered Baruch and Jeremiah to be seized. *But the Lord hid them.*

v. 5.

Abuse of a Pen-knife.

v. 23.

v. 24.

v. 26.

It was an expensive jest, not only for the king and his butterfly princes, but for the whole nation. "A man in a dungeon," wrote Pascal, "not knowing whether his sentence is decided, and having but an hour to learn, and that hour being sufficient if he knows the decision to get it revoked, it is contrary to nature that he should employ this hour, not in ascertaining if the sentence is decided, but in playing piquet." Playing piquet, or playing at Bible-burning—it is all one: the end is disaster, that might have been avoided. It was Jehoiakim's "hour to learn," and this was the poor use he made of it, learning nothing but how well leaves burn in a brazier—leaves inscribed with heaven's truth! He has had many imitators.

Jer. xxxvi. 1–32.

Playing with Fire—Costly Work.

The imitator need not have literally a pen-knife and fire. To read the Bible, and then live in disregard of its teaching, indifferent to its warning, is to act in the way of Jehoiakim. The Bible of the impenitent, the unfaithful, the covetous, the unloving, has many torn pages.

The roll was burnt, the last leaf lay black and shrivelled in the brazier: therefore all was over, and Divine judgment was deleted? By no means. There is no such easy way of arresting the march of God's word, then or now. As Sir Theodore Watts-Dunton has impressively sung—

Return of Murdered Truth.

> When murdered Truth returns she comes to kill.

Neither Jeremiah nor Baruch lacked the martyr's courage. If it pleased God to hide them, they would not use their hiding-time idly: their retreat

vv. 27–32.

Jer. xxxvi. 1–32.

would still be a shrine of truth. The contents of the burnt roll would be re-written, mitigating not a jot of their severity. There was no abridgment, but enlargement: *there were added besides unto them many like words.* Every opposition to Divine truth adds to the weight of its ultimate judgements. It is like a vain effort to dam a rising flood: to arrest it for a while is to increase its volume and swell the raging of its cataracts when the dam bursts.

The Path of Penitence.

There is one way—and only one—of facing the approach of judgement, and that is the way of repentance. There are not fires enough in all the earth to consume and destroy one page of God's writing: but tears will do what the fire cannot. Tears can turn judgement into mercy, and bring the penitent soul from Sinai to Calvary, where another indelible scripture may be read throughout all time—"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." Men, in the winter-house before the fire, have tried to burn those words also: but they remain and shall remain when earth and heaven have passed away.

An Application

Copies of William Tyndale's New Testament were burnt, but its truth outlived those who kindled the fires. When his Romanist opponents were burning Luther's writings, it was remarked—"Yes, they may burn his books, but they cannot burn the truth that is in them." When Paul was suffering "trouble, as an evil-doer, even unto bonds," he

comforted himself and his companions with the thought—" the word of God is not bound " (2 Tim. ii. 9). It is not the foes of the Bible who hurt it; but those who read it, and abuse or misuse it; those who profess much familiarity with the letter of it, but neither breathe its spirit nor walk in its way. Jer. xxxvi. 1–32.

A Supplication

God of all grace, we bless Thee for the Holy Scriptures. May the Spirit that inspired their writing inspire us in reading them. As they always speak the truth in love, help us to come face to face with all the truth that is in them, though it should pierce both heart and conscience with many wounds: for Thy love will heal the wound which Thy truth has made. Help us to have a whole Bible, with no torn pages, so that our lives may be complete in all grace. Amen.

XXVII

A PRISONER OF GOD

Then Pharaoh's army was come forth out of Egypt: and when the Chaldeans that besieged Jerusalem heard tidings of them, they departed from Jerusalem. Then came the word of the LORD unto the prophet Jeremiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Thus shall ye say to the king of Judah, that sent you unto me to enquire of me; Behold, Pharaoh's army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt into their own land. And the Chaldeans shall come again, and fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire. Thus saith the LORD; Deceive not yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us: for they shall not depart. For though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chaldeans that fight against you, and there remained *but* wounded men among them, *yet* should they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire. And it came to pass, that when the army of the Chaldeans was broken up from Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh's army, then Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin, to separate himself thence in the midst of the people. And when he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the ward *was* there, whose name *was* Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah; and he took Jeremiah the prophet, saying, Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans. Then said Jeremiah, *It is* false; I fall not away to the Chaldeans. But he hearkened not to him: so Irijah took Jeremiah, and brought him to the princes. Wherefore the princes were wroth with Jeremiah, and smote him, and put him in prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe: for they had made that the prison. When Jeremiah was entered into the dungeon, and into the cabins, and Jeremiah had remained there many days; then Zedekiah the king sent, and took him out: and the king asked him secretly in his

house, and said, Is there *any* word from the LORD? And Jeremiah said, There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon. Moreover Jeremiah said unto king Zedekiah, What have I offended against thee, or against thy servants, or against this people, that ye have put me in prison? Where *are* now your prophets which prophesied unto you, saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land? Therefore hear now, I pray thee, O my lord the king: let my supplication, I pray thee, be accepted before thee; that thou cause me not to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there. Then Zedekiah the king commanded that they should commit Jeremiah into the court of the prison, and that they should give him daily a piece of bread out of the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city were spent. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison. . . . Then took they Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech, that *was* in the court of the prison: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. And in the dungeon *there was* no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire. Now when Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin: Ebed-melech went forth out of the king's house, and spake to the king, saying, My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for *there is* no more bread in the city. Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die. So Ebed-melech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took thence old cast clouts and old rotten rags, and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah. And Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said unto Jeremiah, Put now *these* old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords. And Jeremiah did so. So they drew up Jeremiah with cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison. Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took Jeremiah the prophet unto him into the third entry that *is* in the house of the LORD: and the king said unto Jeremiah, I will ask thee a thing; hide nothing from me. Then Jeremiah said unto Zedekiah, If I declare *it* unto thee, wilt thou not surely

put me to death? and if I give thee counsel, wilt thou not hearken unto me? So Zedekiah the king sware secretly unto Jeremiah, saying, *As* the LORD liveth, that made us this soul, I will not put thee to death, neither will I give thee into the hand of these men that seek thy life. Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, and thine house: but if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand. And Zedekiah the king said unto Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand, and they mock me. But Jeremiah said, They shall not deliver *thee*. Obey, I beseech thee, the voice of the LORD, which I speak unto thee: so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live. But if thou refuse to go forth, this *is* the word that the LORD hath shewed me: And, behold, all the women that are left in the king of Judah's house *shall be* brought forth to the king of Babylon's princes, and those *women* shall say, Thy friends have set thee on, and have prevailed against thee: thy feet are sunk in the mire, *and* they are turned away back. So they shall bring out all thy wives and thy children to the Chaldeans: and thou shalt not escape out of their hand, but shalt be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon: and thou shalt cause this city to be burned with fire. . . . Then the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah in Riblah before his eyes: also the king of Babylon slew all the nobles of Judah. Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with chains, to carry him to Babylon. . . . Now the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah, while he was shut up in the court of the prison, saying, Go and speak to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring my words upon this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be *accomplished* in that day before thee. But I will deliver thee in that day, saith the LORD: and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou *art* afraid. For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee: because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the LORD.—JER. XXXVII. 5–21; XXXVIII. 6–23; XXXIX. 6, 7, 15–18.

A Prisoner of God

JEREMIAH'S attitude towards Jehoiakim was that of uncompromising hostility; but towards Zedekiah it was more that of a patient mother towards an invalid child. He was such a feeble king in the midst of such big, fateful events: how could any one fight such a weakling? He was a tool in the hands of his cabinet; those who used him despised him. Jer. xxxvii. 5–21.

The first siege of the city by the Chaldeans was raised at the approach of Pharaoh's army. It was one of those occasions when a city, in a delirious sense of relief, is tempted to give itself to mafficking. And the loyal prophet, all his predictions apparently falsified, himself stung by a sense of failure, is covered with ridicule. In so gloomy an hour he may be tempted to repeat his complaint: v. 5. xx. 7.

> O Lord, Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived;
> Thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed:
> I am become a laughing-stock all the day,
> Every one mocketh me.

The prevailing God would deliver him from derision, but at terrible cost—re-appointing him to be the trumpeter of doom. vv. 6–10.

During the siege, the king and his court, driven by panic to last resorts, had begged for his help, *Pray now unto the Lord our God for us.* They wanted his prayers, when they rejected his appeals. To them prayer was a form of magic, without any ethical implications. How that, too, must have wounded his soul! But now the Master who had proved stronger than he summons him once more to v. 3.

Jer. xxxvii. 5–21.

return to his perilous post. He was strictly charged to warn both king and people that the Chaldeans would return, and no Egyptian army would come to the rescue the second time.

vv. 11–15.

Jeremiah, believing his own word, made preparations to retire for safety to Anathoth, before the Chaldeans came back. He came to the north gate, "the gate of Benjamin," and failed to pass. The officer who kept watch at the gate arrested him as a deserter to the Chaldeans—a natural mistake to make, and also a convenient one. The Prophet warmly repudiated the charge, but the officer had too good an eye to his duty or his promotion to let him go. He brought him to the princes, who in their uncurbed wrath smote him and had him cast into a dungeon. He was there for many days before the king fetched him for a secret interview. The Prophet came; but the dungeon had not broken his spirit or weakened his loyalty to the truth. Asked by the king if there was a word from the Lord, he replied without any reservation:

Accused of Deserting.

v. 17.

There is . . . thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon. And then he uttered his protest against his unjust imprisonment; for the Chaldeans had returned and his forecast was being confirmed. He had suffered hunger with the rest during the siege; but in addition the gloom and solitude and noisome air of the dungeon had entered his very soul, and his protest was swiftly changed into a heart-broken petition: *Hear now, O my lord the king: let my supplication, I pray thee, be accepted before thee that thou cause me not to return to the house*

v. 20.

of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there. All the horror of the dungeon shows itself in the desperate cry. Jer. xxxvii.

In the court of the guard Jeremiah again found opportunity for publishing his message and giving counsel—a counsel of despair. To remain in the city was to die by the sword and famine and pestilence; those who wished to survive at all had better go out to the Chaldeans and make terms with them before the final assault and massacre—*he shall have his life for a prey, and shall live.* It was a blunt counsel for lowering the death-rate. When the princes—especially some of his irreconcilable opponents—found this out, they hastened to the king to accuse him of weakening the hands of the men of war that remained in the city—no doubt a well-grounded charge, as far as it went. Indeed, it was not so much an accusation, as a demand for his instant death. If a powerful ruler like David felt helpless against the vindictive cunning of the sons of Zeruiah (2 Sam. iii. 39), how could Zedekiah —"a king that was no king"—hope to curb his evil counsellors? He surrenders, in abject helplessness, to them, to let them do their will on their unhappy victim: *for the king is not he that can do anything against you.* Instead of killing him outright, they doomed him to a slow and wretched death, lowering him with cords into a deep, waterless, filthy pit, where he sank in the miry sediment —apparently more loathsome than Jonathan's dungeon. Jer. xxxvii. 5–21; xxxviii. 6–23. Chap. XXXVIII. 3–6. God's Word not bound.

God's Providence loves to introduce the unexpected into human affairs; and here an Ethiopian Ethiopian as Good Samaritan. vv. 7–13.

Jer. xxxviii. 6–23. xiii. 23.

eunuch furnishes the surprise. The Prophet who had asked, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin?" is to find out that an Ethiopian may possess a brave and beautiful soul. Moved, whether by human pity alone or by personal esteem as well, Ebedmelech imperilled his own safety to save the Prophet's life. He pleaded with the king that the victim of the princes' malice would starve to death; for bread was scarce even in the city, in its palaces and for its men of war, and who would spare any for the unpopular inmate of a dungeon? The king, ever yielding to the nearest influence, once more gave his consent; and the story is graphically told how Ebedmelech first of all humanely provided himself with "old cast clouts and old rotten rags" from the royal lumber-room, and threw them down for the Prophet to place them under his armpits to save the cords cutting into the flesh when he was being pulled up. Worn out with hunger and physical wretchedness and mental anguish, so he was snatched from the jaws of death.

vv. 14–23.

A Last Interview.

The last interview between the king and the Prophet is painful and pitiful. The poor-souled, broken reed of a ruler is entreated to surrender himself to the Chaldeans; but Zedekiah is too frightened, strangely enough not of the Chaldeans, but of the large number of Jewish deserters, who if they had the least chance might wreak their vengeance upon him as the cause of national disaster. Were they not suffering from his foolish policy of alliance with futile Egypt?—a policy that had brought them not profit but shame!

Might they not use physical violence against him if he came among them? Jeremiah reassured him, and entreated him, if he only obeyed the voice of the Lord—*so it shall be well with thee, and thy soul shall live.* If he refused to obey, himself with all his house and the city would be involved in ruin and slaughter. Jer. xxxviii. 6–23. Isa. xxx. 5.

In closing the interview the timorous king begged Jeremiah not to divulge to the princes what had passed between them, but to cover it up with half-truth. In pity for the miserable weakling, and also probably from a firm conviction that telling the whole truth would add to the king's danger and his own without any compensating good result—he yielded, and used the king's formula in his reply to the suspicious princes. It is a problem in the "economy of truth" how far he is to be blamed, or if he is to be blamed at all, for the protective concealment. In any case the king was too timid to accept the advice, which was more humane than military; and so, in the Prophet's words, he "caused" the city to be burned with fire. v. 23.

A final message of hope is given as a reward to Ebedmelech. In the city's destruction, when Zedekiah was taken in ignominious flight and his eyes put out, the Ethiopian was guaranteed safety. *I will deliver thee in that day, saith the Lord: and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid.* The same promise—scanty but sufficient—was given to him as to Baruch, his life for a prey: *because thou hast put thy trust in Me, saith the Lord.* So he disappears from the narrative, xxxix. 6, 7, 15–18.

Jer. xxxix. 6, 7, 15–18. but remains a permanent member of the Guild of the Good Samaritan, to be numbered with those who, "from the east and west," sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the children of the kingdom are cast out into outer darkness.

Matt. viii. 10–12.

An Application

xxxvii. 17 *Is there any word from the Lord? . . . There is*— always. But who will faithfully bear it from Him, subtracting nothing from it, adding nothing to it? And when it is delivered, how many will give heed? It may be a fire to burn the dross; what if our idols are reckoned as dross for the burning? It may be a hammer to break the rock in pieces; what if our heart be the rock? Better not ask for a word from the Lord, than obtain it and despise it. Many came to Jesus, asking questions and seeking signs; and yet they went away poorer, and sometimes sadder, because it was not the word they desired. We consult God in order that He may agree with us, instead of consulting Him that we may learn His will.

A Supplication

O Thou Strength of the weak, Light of those who walk in twilight paths, grant Thy messengers that they may not shrink from declaring Thy whole counsel. Let not our friendships make us less

sincere in honouring the sanctities of truth. Give us a stronger desire for saving men than for pleasing them. And yet preserve our mind and spirit in Thy perfect charity, that we may ever speak the truth in love. Amen.

Jer. xxxix. 6, 7, 15–18.

XXVIII

LAST APPEARANCE

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, after that Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he had taken him being bound in chains among all that were carried away captive of Jerusalem and Judah, which were carried away captive unto Babylon. And the captain of the guard took Jeremiah, and said unto him, The LORD thy God hath pronounced this evil upon this place. Now the LORD hath brought *it*, and done according as he hath said: because ye have sinned against the LORD, and have not obeyed his voice, therefore this thing is come upon you. And now, behold, I loose thee this day from the chains which *were* upon thine hand. If it seem good unto thee to come with me into Babylon, come; and I will look well unto thee: but if it seem ill unto thee to come with me into Babylon, forbear: behold, all the land *is* before thee: whither it seemeth good and convenient for thee to go, thither go. Now while he was not yet gone back, *he said*, Go back also to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon hath made governor over the cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people: or go wheresoever it seemeth convenient unto thee to go. So the captain of the guard gave him victuals and a reward, and let him go. Then went Jeremiah unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah; and dwelt with him among the people that were left in the land. . . . Now it came to pass in the seventh month, *that* Ishmael the son of Nethaniah the son of Elishama, of the seed royal, and the princes of the king, even ten men with him, came unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah; and there they did eat bread together in Mizpah. Then arose Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and the ten men that were with him, and smote Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan with the sword, and slew him, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land.

Last Appearance

Ishmael also slew all the Jews that were with him, *even* with Gedaliah, at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans that were found there, *and* the men of war. And it came to pass the second day after he had slain Gedaliah, and no man knew *it*, that there came certain from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria, *even* fourscore men, having their beards shaven, and their clothes rent, and having cut themselves, with offerings and incense in their hand, to bring *them* to the house of the LORD. And Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went forth from Mizpah to meet them, weeping all along as he went: and it came to pass, as he met them, he said unto them, Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam. And it was *so*, when they came into the midst of the city, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah slew them, *and cast them* into the midst of the pit, he, and the men that *were* with him. But ten men were found among them that said unto Ishmael, Slay us not: for we have treasures in the field, of wheat, and of barley, and of oil, and of honey. So he forbare, and slew them not among their brethren. . . . Then all the captains of the forces, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, and all the people from the least even unto the greatest, came near, and said unto Jeremiah the prophet, Let, we beseech thee, our supplication be accepted before thee, and pray for us unto the LORD thy God, *even* for all this remnant; (for we are left *but* a few of many, as thine eyes do behold us:) that the LORD thy God may shew us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do. Then Jeremiah the prophet said unto them, I have heard *you;* behold, I will pray unto the LORD your God according to your words; and it shall come to pass, *that* whatsoever thing the LORD shall answer you, I will declare *it* unto you; I will keep nothing back from you. Then they said to Jeremiah, The LORD be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the LORD thy God shall send thee to us. Whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the LORD our God. And it came to pass after ten days, that the word of the LORD came unto Jeremiah. Then called he Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces which *were* with him, and all the people from the least even to the greatest, and said unto them, Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, unto whom ye sent me to present your supplication before him; if ye will still abide in this land, then will

I build you, and not pull *you* down, and I will plant you, and not pluck *you* up: for I repent me of the evil that I have done unto you. Be not afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom ye are afraid; be not afraid of him, saith the LORD: for I *am* with you to save you, and to deliver you from his hand. And I will shew mercies unto you, that he may have mercy upon you, and cause you to return to your own land. But if ye say, We will not dwell in this land, neither obey the voice of the LORD your God, saying, No; but we will go into the land of Egypt, where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor have hunger of bread; and there will we dwell: and now therefore hear the word of the LORD, ye remnant of Judah; Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; If ye wholly set your faces to enter into Egypt, and go to sojourn there; then it shall come to pass, *that* the sword, which ye feared, shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine, whereof ye were afraid, shall follow close after you there in Egypt; and there ye shall die. . . . For ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the LORD your God, saying, Pray for us unto the LORD our God; and according unto all that the LORD our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do *it*. . . . And it came to pass, *that* when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking unto all the people all the words of the LORD their God, for which the LORD their God had sent him to them, *even* all these words, then spake Azariah the son of Hoshaiah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the proud men, saying unto Jeremiah, Thou speakest falsely: the LORD our God hath not sent thee to say, Go not into Egypt to sojourn there: but Baruch the son of Neriah setteth thee on against us, for to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they might put us to death, and carry us away captives into Babylon. So Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces, and all the people, obeyed not the voice of the LORD, to dwell in the land of Judah. But Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces, took all the remnant of Judah, that were returned from all nations, whither they had been driven, to dwell in the land of Judah; *even* men, and women, and children, and the king's daughters, and every person that Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Jeremiah the prophet, and Baruch the son of Neriah. So they came into the land of Egypt: for they obeyed not the voice of the LORD: thus came they *even* to Tahpanhes. Then came the word of the

Last Appearance

LORD unto Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, saying, Take great stones in thine hand, and hide them in the clay in the brick-kiln, which *is* at the entry of Pharaoh's house in Tahpanhes, in the sight of the men of Judah; and say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will send and take Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will set his throne upon these stones that I have hid; and he shall spread his royal pavilion over them.—JER. XL. 1–6; XLI. 1–8; XLII. 1–16, 20; XLIII. 1–10.

JEREMIAH was one of the confused, miserable crowd of captives in chains, starting for Babylon—as miserable a sight, in ancient or modern warfare, as any under heaven, with its unimaginable horrors. Strong men, but recently stout patriots fighting for their land and home, are now as helpless as babes; women are but slaves, defenceless against their captors' evil minds: the lives of children are of as little account as their tired cries. Jeremiah is one of the unwieldy concourse, himself also chained, and sharing with his adversaries and mockers the weight of the dread judgment which he had so faithfully foretold. But when they reach Ramah, the captain of the guard, Nebuzaradan, by Nebuchadrezzar's command, releases him—probably through the good offices of Gedaliah, who may have explained to the victors the place and attitude of the Prophet. On his release he was given his choice—either to proceed with the captives to Babylon, or to remain with Gedaliah and help him in the heavy task of reconstruction. He chose the latter.

Jer. xl. 1–6; xli. 1–8; xlii. 1–16, 20; xliii. 1–10.

Companion of Exiles.

xl. 1–6.

Gedaliah's noble character relieves the dismal narrative, though very nobleness led to his own death and the end of reconstructive plans. The

Jer. xl. 1–6 ; xli. 1–8 ; xlii. 1–16, 20 ; xliii. 1–10.

fugitive Jews repaired to him, from among the children of Ammon, from Moab and Edom: but unhappily they brought with them a traitor in the person of Ishmael, an assassin in the pay of Baalis, king of the Ammonites. What the Ammonite grudge against Gedaliah might have been is not mentioned; but it was manifestly connected with an anti-Chaldean plot. Gedaliah was warned of the plot, but being himself magnanimous, would not believe in anything so mean. Ishmael took advantage of his trustfulness, and did his ignoble work only too well: it ended not in the murder of one, but the slaughter of many, and the taking of the rest captives to Ammon. But in this last purpose he was frustrated: being pursued by the friends of Gedaliah and routed, he escaped with only eight survivors and fled to the Ammonites. The recovered captives, led by Johanan, settled near Bethlehem, with the view of emigrating to Egypt, fearing that the Chaldeans would avenge the death of Gedaliah, their appointed governor of the residue.

xli. 1–18. A Tragedy of Trustfulness.

xlii. 1–6. Pious Pretence.

Both the leaders and the people they had rescued now sought the advice and intercession of Jeremiah. *Pray for us unto the Lord thy God, even for all this remnant; for we are left but a few of many, as thine eyes do behold us: that the Lord thy God may show us the way wherein we should walk, and the thing that we should do.* Jeremiah believed in their sincerity, and accepted the responsible task, promising to give them God's own answer—*I will keep nothing back from you.* They repeated their oath of *obedience:*

whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord our God to whom we send thee. It is only in this last pledge that they change "thy God" into "our God"—as though it were a tardy afterthought. Jer. xl. 1–6; xli. 1–8; xlii. 1–16, 20; xliii. 1–10.

Jeremiah spent ten days in prayer and converse with God, and then brought them God's instructions. They were to dwell where they were, and God would build and plant them securely. There was no ground for their fear of Chaldean retaliation: *be not afraid of him, saith the Lord: for I am with you to save you.* But even as he spoke, the prophet became aware of the policy which would steal their hearts from him. All the time their mind was fixed on Egypt—*where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor have hunger of bread.* Who can fight with the hallucinations of the human heart? They listened with "uncircumcised ear" to the man whom they had sent to God as their suppliant ambassador. If they *will* go to Egypt the judgment of Jerusalem will pursue and overtake them; sword, famine, pestilence will leave none to remain. They had deceived Jeremiah, they would fain deceive God; but that was not all—*ye have dealt deceitfully against your own souls.* This is the remorselessness of sin: the soul that sins is the worst deceived. In its vanity, it fancies that it has succeeded in deceiving others, and even God; but when the end grows clear none is so taken in as the soul itself. vv. 7–22.

Jeremiah's worst fears were verified. The leaders replied—significantly named "all the proud men" God's Counsel rejected.

Jer. xl. 1–6 ; xli. 1–8 ; xlii. 1–16, 20 ; xliii. 1–10.

—*Thou speakest falsely : the Lord our God hath not sent thee to say, Ye shall not go into Egypt to sojourn there.* Strangely enough, they accuse Baruch of being Jeremiah's prompter.

It would not be wise to blame this deluded remnant unadvisedly. Men constantly pretend to consult God when their inmost mind is already made up. They have Egypt in their heart before they begin to pray, and expect God to say " Amen." They, too, deal deceitfully against their own souls ; they seduce their own consciences ; they only play at praying.

xliii. 1–7.

So they took their own way—*the men, and the women, and the children, and the king's daughters, and every person that Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had left . . . and Jeremiah the prophet, and Baruch the son of Neriah*—all went into voluntary exile in Egypt. Jeremiah and Baruch, did they go of their own will ? Most likely : for the prophet could not release himself from the shepherd's sacred duty. He must follow his wandering flock ; and still be at hand to speak for God to his rebellious congregation. The message is rejected ; but the messenger must be loyal to his commission. *I have not hastened from being a shepherd after Thee.*

vv. 8–13. A Dread Symbol.

At Tahpanhes he had recourse to one of his allegorical acts. By his Lord's direction he took two great stones—not too heavy to be carried in his hands—and hid them *in mortar in the brickwork* at the entry of Pharaoh's house. It was probably only an occasional royal residence, and therefore lent itself more easily and safely for the daring act. It

was a token that Nebuchadrezzar, employed temporarily in God's service, would come and subjugate Egypt, setting his throne upon the hidden stones, and spreading his pavilion over them. The Judean exiles had fled into Egypt for refuge, against the Divine counsel: what a refuge!—a house built on the sand, with a sound of great rain and the moan of winds of doom already in the air (Matt. vii. 26, 27): always the resort of the disobedient, of those who hear God's words and do them not. Their Egypt, thought to be their castle, becomes their grave.

Jer. xl. 1–6 ; xli. 1–8 ; xlii. 1–16, 20 ; xliii. 1–10.

An Application

Thy path is in the great waters. And therefore who can trace them or pass judgement upon them? For surely this is hard to understand—the man who had warned and wept, who had denounced and pleaded, in order to save Jerusalem, is now involved in the abject misery of its ruin and captivity. To think of him in Egypt—lonely and unheeded still, sharing the sorrow and wretchedness of his fellow-exiles, but denied their friendship—to think of him so, is to feel grief almost as if he were still living. The burden would have been at last too much for him, but that he could still write his name —"Jeremiah, the exile of God"; as Paul called himself triumphantly, "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ."

Ps. lxxvii. 19.

A Supplication

Lord, make us worthy to look on great suffering. Give us grace that in the presence of men of sorrows,

Jer. xl. 1–6 ; xli. 1–8 ; xlii. 1–16, 20 ; xliii. 1–10.

we may grow both humble and brave. And when we think with a sacred awe of all sufferers in the cause of Thy holy truth, still renew the cleansing of our soul that we may look on Him, Thy Beloved Son, Whom our fellow-sinners mocked and scourged, and nailed and pierced. And may we, looking unto Jesus, Who endured the cross despising the shame, run with patience the race that is set before us. Amen.

XXIX

HOW READEST THOU?

The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews which dwell in the land of Egypt, which dwell at Migdol, and at Tahpanhes, and at Noph, and in the country of Pathros, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Ye have seen all the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem, and upon all the cities of Judah: and, behold, this day they *are* a desolation, and no man dwelleth therein, because of their wickedness which they have committed to provoke me to anger, in that they went to burn incense, *and* to serve other gods, whom they knew not, *neither* they, ye, nor your fathers. Howbeit I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending *them*, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense unto other gods. Wherefore my fury and mine anger was poured forth, and was kindled in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they are wasted *and* desolate, as at this day. . . . Have ye forgotten the wickedness of your fathers, and the wickedness of the kings of Judah, and the wickedness of their wives, and your own wickedness, and the wickedness of your wives, which they have committed in the land of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem? They are not humbled *even* unto this day, neither have they feared, nor walked in my law, nor in my statutes, that I set before you and before your fathers. Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will set my face against you for evil, and to cut off all Judah. And I will take the remnant of Judah, that have set their faces to go into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, and they shall all be consumed, *and* fall in the land of Egypt; they shall *even* be consumed by the sword *and* by the famine: they shall die, from the least even unto the greatest, by the sword

and by the famine: and they shall be an execration, *and* an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach. For I will punish them that dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence. . . . Then all the men which knew that their wives had burned incense unto other gods, and all the women that stood by, a great multitude, even all the people that dwelt in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah, saying, *As for* the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for *then* had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her, we have wanted all *things*, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine. And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured out drink-offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink-offerings unto her, without our men? Then Jeremiah said unto all the people, to the men, and to the women, and to all the people which had given him *that* answer, saying, The incense that ye burned in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, ye, and your fathers, your kings, and your princes, and the people of the land, did not the LORD remember them, and came it *not* into his mind? . . . Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying; Ye and your wives have both spoken with your mouths, and fulfilled with your hand, saying, We will surely perform our vows that we have vowed, to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto her: ye will surely accomplish your vows, and surely perform your vows. Therefore hear ye the word of the LORD, all Judah that dwell in the land of Egypt; Behold, I have sworn by my great name, saith the LORD, that my name shall no more be named in the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, The Lord GOD liveth. Behold, I will watch over them for evil, and not for good: and all the men of Judah that *are* in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and by the famine, until there be an end of them. Yet a small number that escape the sword shall return out of the land of Egypt into the land of Judah, and all the remnant of Judah

that are gone into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, shall know whose words shall stand, mine, or theirs.—JER. XLIV. 1–6, 9–13, 15–21, 25–28.

HISTORY is so hard to read rightly, so easy to misread. Men carry their prejudices with them, and colour the past and its lessons according to the bias of their mind. The most careful historian is, deep down in his nature, a partisan: he may strive to keep it down, but the subterranean current will now and again surreptitiously rise to the surface and colour the placid flow of his judgements. If this be true of the thoughtful who strive to be unbiassed, what of those who wallow in their prejudices and are steeped in superstitions? **Jer. xliv. 1–6, 9–13, 15–21, 25–28.**

The Case for God.

Jeremiah found himself up against this when he appealed to the exiles in Egypt to give up their idolatrous rites and return to Jehovah wholeheartedly. Jeremiah states the case for God: He had not neglected them, He had not left them or their fathers without teaching and warning, solemnly and repeatedly forbidding them to burn incense and serve other gods. He had sent to them His prophets, not a few nor lacking in zeal—*rising up early and sending them*, as though He, the Ever-Vigilant, each morning called His messengers to their task. It brings to mind what is said of our Saviour, in His first ministry among the cities of the Lake, that "in the morning rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." No soul can say to God the Saviour—"I sought Thee early," but He can reply—"And I sought thee earlier still." **Mark i. 35.**

Jer. xliv. 1–6, 9–13, 15–21, 25–28.

God had sent prophet after prophet, and the warning had been faithfully given: it had been rejected and despised; and now Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah, the prophet cried, "are a desolation"—"they are wasted and desolate, as at this day." It was a strange, painful scene. These exiles from home in a strangers' land, hard and supercilious, followed by the broken-hearted but still heroic prophet—they look in each other's faces, and there is no ray of hope, or of repentance, to make either glad. Away from their own land, had they not reconsidered their ways? would they not now return to God?

v. 9. *Have ye forgotten the wickedness of your fathers, and the wickedness of the kings of Judah, and the wickedness of their wives, and your own wickedness, and the wickedness of your wives, which they have committed in the land of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem?* Had the fallow ground been broken up in the hearts of these exiles, the keen, sincere appeal might have prevailed. He must have read failure in their faces from the very first: his words, as he proceeds become keener and more uncompromising, ending in a wail of doom—

v. 13. *I will punish them that dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem.* They had carried the sins of Jerusalem with them to Tahpanhes, they shall also meet Jerusalem's fate. God continues to write His righteous judgements into the history of the world, from age to age, from country to country.

vv. 15–19. Defiance.

They were stung to the quick: the men knew that their wives had burnt incense to other gods,

and the wives were there to see that their husbands should neither be dumb nor apologetic. They reply with one voice of defiance: *they* would not hearken to what the prophet was pleased to call "the word of the Lord"; *they* would do just as they liked, they would proclaim loudly "that they would *burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and pour out drink-offerings unto her.*" They were not ashamed of what they and their fathers, and their kings, and their princes had done in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem! And in this mood of defiance they gave Jeremiah another reading of history. While they were faithful to the queen of heaven—before Josiah's reformation—they had plenty of bread, and were well, and saw no evil. It was since people had left off paying homage to the queen of heaven that they had wanted all things, and been consumed by the sword and by famine! Then the women continue the tirade, as having a special grievance—*When we burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured out drink-offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to worship her and pour out drink-offerings unto her, without our men?*

Jer. xliv. 1–6, 13, 15–21, 25–29.

The controversy ends dismally. The prophet, in the irony of a sorely-tried soul, replies, first to the women—*Ye will surely accomplish your vows, and surely perform your vows.* The very repetition deepens the irony. The words mean the same as the solemn phrases on the Bible's last page: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still." Then he turns to

The Appeal to History. vv. 20–30.

Jer. xliv. 1–6, 9–13, 15–21, 25–28.

the company in general, and proclaims the almost total extinction of this colony of fugitives. A few would escape back to their own land, the rest would perish: *Behold I have sworn by My great name, saith the Lord, that My name shall no more be named in the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, As the Lord God liveth.* Is this simply a forecast of their extinction, or has it a deeper moral content? If they could not remain true to Jehovah, even in Jerusalem, where they surrounded Him with the queen of heaven and other heathen gods, how much less in the wholly luxurious heathen atmosphere of Egypt? Idols and idolatrous rites would become more and more to them, Jehovah less and less, until He vanished out of their religion altogether. This is the mortal peril of those who emigrate to-day from Christian lands, with only the name of a Christian, to dwell and carry on trade or other office among heathen tribes. Not having the root of the matter, they are in danger of sinking to the low heathen level, rather than help the heathen to rise. They forget their earlier pieties and self-respecting conduct: they give up saying "As the Lord God liveth." They lose more than their life: ideals of moral honour perish within them.

The Prophet ended with a challenge to the future: *All the remnant of Judah . . . shall know whose word shall stand, mine or theirs.* He trusted to the verdict of history.

And yet it is extremely difficult to peruse history without frequent misreadings. Those who consult

it are so anxious to make it say what they like. The hardened audience of Jeremiah seemed to have some reason for their interpretation of events. Josiah himself was cut down in the very glow of his reforming zeal: his loyalty to Jehovah had not ensured his safety. His father Manasseh had rebuilt the high places, reared up altars for Baalim, made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven—and reigned for fifty-five years! That was history, they would say—conveniently omitting the fetters of Babylon with which Manasseh as a conquered captive was bound, and leaving out his repentance at the last.

Jer. xliv. 1–6, 9–13, 15–21, 25–28.

Reviewing the scene and the controversy, we can learn first of all that God's designs are too vast for even the wisest to interpret them readily. One movement may extend over centuries, and who shall be the interpreter? he who watches its beginnings; or those who successively watch its progress, now clear, now hidden; or those who behold its widespread conclusions? Impromptu interpretations of such vast and complex designs are worse than useless. Two men, inheriting different traditions, cherishing opposite views, will each find what he looks for—because he brings it with him. Even accepting the reading of the exiles that famine and sword had followed the reformation of Josiah, how had the reformation itself been used? Had its emotional fervour led to moral quickening? Had even the temple-priests been redeemed by it from their formalism? Had the revival been real, had the reform been sincere and progressive, had

"On Earth, the broken Arc."

Jer. xliv. 1–6, 9–13, 15–21, 25–28.

the whole nation turned to God with rejoicing heart, and calamities still followed as they now had, *then* there might be some excuse for the exiles' heresy. English history has been from time to time just as much abused, because of short, prejudiced views. So indeed have periods in the history of the Christian Church been misjudged, and reformations falsely weighed and falsely blamed. We often carry within us what we see without. John Ruskin relates this personal experience: "Some years ago, as I was talking of the curvilinear forms in a piece of rock to one of our academicians, he said to me, in a somewhat despondent accent, 'If you look for curves, you will see curves; if you look for angles, you will see angles.'" The saying, Ruskin adds, seemed an infinitely sad one, expressing as it does "one of the most singular gifts, or, if abused, most singular weaknesses, of the human mind . . . its power of persuading itself to see whatever it chooses. . . . In all things throughout the world, the men who look for the crooked will see the crooked, and the men who look for the straight will see the straight."

An Application

Chronologically, this is the Prophet's last message —"and after that, the dark." "Let us leave everything to the Lord," said Savonarola, in his farewell sermon to Florence, on his way to the martyr's death: "He is the Master Who shapes the instrument to His own purposes; and when He requires it no longer, He casts it aside, as He suffered

Jeremiah to be stoned to death; and so will it be with us, when we have accomplished His purpose. Well, we are willing: His will be done." Whether it be true or no that Jeremiah was stoned to death, it is true that he lived the martyr's life—which is even harder—and won the martyr's crown.

Jer. xliv. 1–6, 13, 15–21, 25–29.

A Supplication

Save us, O Lord, from the impatience of Time. When Thy truth is not vindicated in the way and at the hour we expected, keep our hearts from mistrusting Thee, from doubting the final triumph of Thy Word. Thou hast so much more and greater to do than we know, that Thy times cannot be our times. Help us to look from the battlefields of an age to the tranquillity and light of the everlasting hills, and continue to trust in Thee and do the right, for the sake of Jesus Christ, the First and the Last. Amen.

XXX

THE DAWN OF INTERNATIONALISM

The word of the LORD which came to Jeremiah the prophet against the Gentiles; against Egypt, against the army of Pharaoh-necho king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates in Carchemish, which Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon smote in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah. Order ye the buckler and shield, and draw near to battle. Harness the horses; and get up, ye horsemen, and stand forth with *your* helmets; furbish the spears, *and* put on the brigandines. Wherefore have I seen them dismayed *and* turned away back? and their mighty ones are beaten down, and are fled apace, and look not back: *for* fear *was* round about, saith the LORD. Let not the swift flee away, nor the mighty man escape; they shall stumble, and fall toward the north by the river Euphrates. Who *is* this *that* cometh up as a flood, whose waters are moved as the rivers? Egypt riseth up like a flood, and *his* waters are moved like the rivers; and he saith, I will go up, *and* will cover the earth; I will destroy the city and the inhabitants thereof. Come up, ye horses; and rage, ye chariots; and let the mighty men come forth; the Ethiopians and the Libyans, that handle the shield; and the Lydians, that handle *and* bend the bow. For this *is* the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, that he may avenge him of his adversaries: and the sword shall devour, and it shall be satiate and made drunk with their blood: for the Lord GOD of hosts hath a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates. Go up into Gilead, and take balm, O virgin, the daughter of Egypt: in vain shalt thou use many medicines; *for* thou shalt not be cured. The nations have heard of thy shame, and thy cry hath filled the land: for the mighty man hath stumbled against the mighty, *and* they are fallen both together. The word that the LORD spake to Jeremiah the prophet, how Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon should come *and* smite the

land of Egypt. Declare ye in Egypt, and publish in Migdol, and publish in Noph and in Tahpanhes: say ye, Stand fast, and prepare thee; for the sword shall devour round about thee. Why are thy valiant *men* swept away? they stood not, because the LORD did drive them. He made many to fall, yea, one fell upon another: and they said, Arise, and let us go again to our own people, and to the land of our nativity, from the oppressing sword. They did cry there, Pharaoh king of Egypt *is but* a noise; he hath passed the time appointed. . . . The LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saith; Behold, I will punish the multitude of No, and Pharaoh, and Egypt, with their gods, and their kings; even Pharaoh, and *all* them that trust in him: and I will deliver them into the hand of those that seek their lives, and into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of his servants: and afterward it shall be inhabited, as in the days of old, saith the LORD. But fear not thou, O my servant Jacob, and be not dismayed, O Israel: for, behold, I will save thee from afar off, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and be in rest and at ease, and none shall make *him* afraid. Fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith the LORD: for I *am* with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee: but I will not make a full end of thee, but correct thee in measure; yet will I not leave thee wholly unpunished. . . . The word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah the prophet against the Philistines, before that Pharaoh smote Gaza. Thus saith the LORD; Behold, waters rise up out of the north, and shall be an overflowing flood, and shall overflow the land, and all that is therein; the city, and them that dwell therein; then the men shall cry, and all the inhabitants of the land shall howl. At the noise of the stamping of the hoofs of his strong *horses*, at the rushing of his chariots, *and at* the rumbling of his wheels, the fathers shall not look back to *their* children for feebleness of hands; because of the day that cometh to spoil all the Philistines, *and* to cut off from Tyrus and Zidon every helper that remaineth: for the LORD will spoil the Philistines, the remnant of the country of Caphtor. Baldness is come upon Gaza; Ashkelon is cut off *with* the remnant of their valley: how long wilt thou cut thyself? O thou sword of the LORD, how long *will it be* ere thou be quiet? put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still. How can it be quiet, seeing the LORD hath given it a charge against Ashkelon, and against the sea shore? there hath he appointed it. . . . Against Moab

thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Woe unto Nebo! for it is spoiled: Kiriathaim is confounded *and* taken: Misgab is confounded and dismayed. *There shall be* no more praise of Moab: in Heshbon they have devised evil against it; come, and let us cut it off from *being* a nation. Also thou shalt be cut down, O Madmen; the sword shall pursue thee. A voice of crying *shall be* from Horonaim, spoiling and great destruction. Moab is destroyed; her little ones have caused a cry to be heard. . . . O ye that dwell in Moab, leave the cities, and dwell in the rock, and be like the dove *that* maketh her nest in the sides of the hole's mouth. We have heard the pride of Moab, (he is exceeding proud,) his loftiness, and his arrogancy, and his pride, and the haughtiness of his heart. I know his wrath, saith the LORD; but *it shall* not *be* so; his lies shall not so effect *it*. Therefore will I howl for Moab, and I will cry out for all Moab; *mine heart* shall mourn for the men of Kirheres. O vine of Sibmah, I will weep for thee with the weeping of Jazer: thy plants are gone over the sea, they reach *even* to the sea of Jazer: the spoiler is fallen upon thy summer fruits and upon thy vintage. And joy and gladness is taken from the plentiful field, and from the land of Moab; and I have caused wine to fail from the winepress: none shall tread with shouting; *their* shouting *shall be* no shouting. . . . And Moab shall be destroyed from *being* a people, because he hath magnified *himself* against the LORD. Fear, and the pit, and the snare, *shall be* upon thee, O inhabitant of Moab, saith the LORD. He that fleeth from the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that getteth up out of the pit shall be taken in the snare: for I will bring upon it, *even* upon Moab, the year of their visitation, saith the LORD. They that fled stood under the shadow of Heshbon because of the force: but a fire shall come forth out of Heshbon, and a flame from the midst of Sihon, and shall devour the corner of Moab, and the crown of the head of the tumultuous ones. Woe be unto thee, O Moab! the people of Chemosh perisheth: for thy sons are taken captives, and thy daughters captives. Yet will I bring again the captivity of Moab in the latter days, saith the LORD. Thus far *is* the judgment of Moab. . . . Concerning the Ammonites, thus saith the LORD; Hath Israel no sons? hath he no heir? why *then* doth their king inherit Gad, and his people dwell in his cities? Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will cause an alarm of war to be heard in Rabbah of the Ammonites; and it shall be a desolate heap, and her daughters shall be burned

with fire: then shall Israel be heir unto them that were his heirs, saith the LORD. Howl, O Heshbon, for Ai is spoiled: cry, ye daughters of Rabbah, gird you with sackcloth; lament, and run to and fro by the hedges; for their king shall go into captivity, *and* his priests and his princes together. Wherefore gloriest thou in the valleys, thy flowing valley, O backsliding daughter? that trusted in her treasures, *saying*, Who shall come unto me? Behold, I will bring a fear upon thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts, from all those that be about thee; and ye shall be driven out every man right forth; and none shall gather up him that wandereth. And afterward I will bring again the captivity of the children of Ammon, saith the LORD. Concerning Edom, thus saith the LORD of hosts; *Is* wisdom no more in Teman? is counsel perished from the prudent? is their wisdom vanished? Flee ye, turn back, dwell deep, O inhabitants of Dedan; for I will bring the calamity of Esau upon him, the time *that* I will visit him. If grapegatherers come to thee, would they not leave *some* gleaning grapes? if thieves by night, they will destroy till they have enough. But I have made Esau bare, I have uncovered his secret places, and he shall not be able to hide himself: his seed is spoiled, and his brethren, and his neighbours, and he *is* not. Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve *them* alive; and let thy widows trust in me. . . . Thy terribleness hath deceived thee, *and* the pride of thine heart, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, that holdest the height of the hill: though thou shouldest make thy nest as high as the eagle, I will bring thee down from thence, saith the LORD. Also Edom shall be a desolation: every one that goeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss at all the plagues thereof. As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbour *cities* thereof, saith the LORD, no man shall abide there, neither shall a son of man dwell in it. Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the swelling of Jordan against the habitation of the strong: but I will suddenly make him run away from her: and who *is* a chosen *man, that* I may appoint over her? for who *is* like me? and who will appoint me the time? and who *is* that shepherd that will stand before me?—JER. XLVI. 1–17, 25–28; XLVII.; XLVIII. 1–4, 28–33, 42–47; XLIX. 1–11, 16–19.

WHEN Jeremiah lifts his eyes from the woe of his own people, and looks to the surrounding nations **Jer. xlvi. 1–17, 25–28.**

Jer. xlvi. 1–17, 25–28.

and to Babylon, it is to exchange one sorrow for another — less personal, but also vaster. The "seething cauldron," boiling over, scalds the nations near and far. He begins with

Battle of Carchemish.

Egypt. A battle, raging wildly, bursts on his view. Horses and horsemen, helmet and coat of mail, they flash into view. But already the tide of battle is turning disastrously against Egypt.

v. 5.

Wherefore have I seen it? is a human cry of pity, notwithstanding the long account of Israel against her. *They are dismayed . . . their mighty ones are beaten down . . . terror is on every side.* Let reinforcements be rushed forward to the rescue!

v. 10.

shields of Cush and Put, bows of Ludim. But nought will avail: the day is *a day of the Lord, a day of vengeance*—"dies irae, dies illa." There is no rescue: there is no medicine even in Gilead for

v. 15.

Egypt's incurable wound. Not only the people, but the very gods of Egypt are dismayed and in flight—according to a variant reading of verse 15: "Why is Apis fled? Thy strong one stood not, because the Lord did thrust him down." Apis, the sacred bull, dwelling-place of the incarnate Osiris, even he deserts the lost field and the stricken hosts! There was a time when the king of Egypt might

v. 17.

have been its saviour: but *he hath let the appointed time pass by*—the opportunity is for ever lost.

Light in the Cloud.

An unexpected note of hope is introduced at the close, in a promise that the calamity will pass after a

v. 26.

time, and Egypt be inhabited as of old. The same note of human kindliness recurs in the case of Moab (xlviii. 47), Ammon (xlix. 6), and Elam (v. 39).

It is like the seed from which " the lily " of the Book of Jonah might have sprung. It shows the Prophet's large heart, seeking and publishing the comfort for nations outside his own. True, he does not include all; there is no room, for instance, for Philistia, the ancient and persistent and implacable enemy of Israel, among the restorations of the future. It was not therefore a clear, unclouded dawn; nevertheless it was a dawn. Jer. xlvi. 1–17, 25–28; xlvii.; xlviii. 1–4, 28–33, 42–47.

Joined with this is a reassuring promise to Jacob—repeated from chap. xxx. 10, 11, and emphasising the revelation from God that He corrects " in measure "; as though we were to write, that in all His corrections there is absolute correctness. v. 28.

Philistia. It is still the waters rising up out of the North, a stream in flood, overflowing the open land and the walled city. Stamping hoofs and rushing chariots fill the land; and *the fathers look not back to their children for feebleness of hands.* Again the human cry of pity from the Prophet: *O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet?* But even with the question comes the answer: *How canst thou be quiet, seeing the Lord hath given thee a charge?* If there is no promise of restoration for Philistia, the failure must have been in the people of themselves. God is the Redeemer of every nation that places itself in the way of redemption. Chap. XLVII. The Sword and the Charge.

Moab. The battle is over, and lost: here the Prophet dwells on the woe of the conquered. They are in flight, " starved and destitute " like the heath in the wilderness. She had trusted in her Chap. XLVIII. Wine on the Lees.

Jer. xlviii. 1–4, 28–33, 42–47; xlix. 1–11, 16–19.

idols and her fortresses; both had failed her. Chemosh, her national god, is himself made captive, with priests and princes. Moab had been spoilt by ease; it had grown feeble through lack of discipline. Like wine which had not been emptied from vessel to vessel, she had settled on the lees, and lost taste. Ease is the snare of a man or a nation. Moab's trust in Chemosh, like Israel's trust in Bethel's golden calf, will end in shame. *How say ye, We are mighty men, and valiant men for the war?* Boasting shall be turned into wailing, when the staff of Moab, the beautiful rod, is broken. *He magnified himself against the Lord;* he had treated Israel with derision, as though he were to be numbered with thieves: *as often as thou speakest of him, thou waggest the head.* The mighty wheel of Providence has revolved, and now Moab's derision is poured back on herself. Judgement approaches; and she herself had woven the threads which make her snare. *Gladness and joy is taken away,* from vineyard and city: the housetops ring with lamentations, and the streets re-echo them. Alas! for Moab—*mine heart soundeth for Moab,* is again the cry of pity from the Prophet's heart. Moab is now no better than a vessel broken; who takes pleasure in it? They would in their extremity escape: but they cannot: *he that fleeth from the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that getteth up out of the pit shall be taken in the snare.* For the present it is all disaster and woe; but in "the latter days" God will bring again the captivity of Moab.

The Human Note.

v. 47.

xlix. 1–6. *Ammon. Hath Israel no son?* the Prophet asks.

Why should the Ammonites seize the territory of Gad, even if he is taken into captivity? there are other tribes of Israel to occupy their brother's dwellings. Why should Ammon, and Ammon's god Malcam, rob Israel? Their judgement, too, is at the door: *Malcam*—like Moab's Chemosh—*shall go into captivity, his priests and his princes together.* Ammon was deaf, glorying in her fertile valleys, trusting in her treasures, and lightly asking, from the security of her abundant supplies, *Who shall come unto me?* Ammon had forgotten the just God, but He is awake and watchful: *I will bring a fear upon thee, saith the Lord.* The attack will bring sudden, overwhelming panic, *and ye shall be driven out every man right forth.* Like the Philistine fathers, no one will turn back to his child, or *gather up him that wandereth.* But "afterward"—hope also for Ammon.

Jer. xlix. 1–11, 16–19. Gods in Captivity. xlviii. 7. v. 6.

Edom. The oracle opens with a question and amazed inquiry—*Is wisdom no more in Teman?* Teman, with her ancient renown for being the abode of wise men! Edom had laughed at Israel's calamity; therefore of all nations, she would not go unpunished. Grape-gatherers may leave some gleaning grapes, thieves by night would leave something undestroyed: but for Edom, vast ruin! She boasted of her rock-bound security; but the clefts of the rock would not protect her. Had she made her nest as high as the eagle, God would bring her down. Who can challenge the power of God? *who is the shepherd that will stand before Me?* The relieving surprise of this dirge is in the gentle words

vv. 7–22. God of the Orphans. v. 12. v. 19.

Jer. xlix. 1–11, 16–19.

of verse 11: *Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in Me.*

The remaining oracles deal with the destruction of Damascus, Kedar and Hazor, and Elam, and present no new features.

An Application

In these international oracles we have what may be called, without undue straining, the early movement of a great mind in the direction of a community of nations. A sense of common disaster, coming at first with utter bewilderment, gradually steadies itself in the conception of God's rule being as wide as the ranges of all the families of men. If there is universal sorrow in the track of Divine judgements, there must be universal hope in the way of Divine mercy; and God's mercy is no less broad than His justice. There it stands—a great prophetic achievement, in which the Spirit of God, moving among the shadows and agonies of a brave human spirit, wrought mightily and victoriously. The sufferings of the Prophet have become one of the noble heritages of the human race.

A Supplication

Almighty Father, Who hast made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth, and hast determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; bring us together in the kinship of Thy love. For-

give us all our hatreds and enmities ; teach us the way of mutual pity and saving help ; establish us in a true covenant of the nations, with Christ for Head and Leader. In Thy light may we see that there is no universal fellowship for men apart from the communion of the Holy Ghost. Grant us, O Lord, in these days, the fullness of Thy Spirit ; for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Jer. xlix. 1–11, 16–19.

XXXI

THE FALL OF THE GOLDEN CUP

The word that the LORD spake against Babylon *and* against the land of the Chaldeans by Jeremiah the prophet. Declare ye among the nations, and publish, and set up a standard; publish, *and* conceal not: say, Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces; her idols are confounded, her images are broken in pieces. For out of the north there cometh up a nation against her, which shall make her land desolate, and none shall dwell therein: they shall remove, they shall depart, both man and beast. In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the LORD their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, *saying*, Come, and let us join ourselves to the LORD in a perpetual covenant *that* shall not be forgotten. My people hath been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away *on* the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their resting-place. All that found them have devoured them: and their adversaries said, We offend not, because they have sinned against the LORD, the habitation of justice, even the LORD, the hope of their fathers. Remove out of the midst of Babylon, and go forth out of the land of the Chaldeans, and be as the he-goats before the flocks. For, lo, I will raise and cause to come up against Babylon an assembly of great nations from the north country: and they shall set themselves in array against her; from thence she shall be taken: their arrows *shall be* as of a mighty expert man: none shall return in vain. And Chaldea shall be a spoil: all that spoil her shall be satisfied, saith the LORD. Because ye were glad, because ye rejoiced, O ye destroyers of mine heritage, because ye are grown fat as the heifer at grass, and bellow as

bulls; your mother shall be sore confounded; she that bare you shall be ashamed: behold, the hindermost of the nations *shall be* a wilderness, a dry land, and a desert. . . . A sound of battle *is* in the land, and of great destruction. How is the hammer of the whole earth cut asunder and broken! how is Babylon become a desolation among the nations! I have laid a snare for thee, and thou art also taken, O Babylon, and thou wast not aware: thou art found, and also caught, because thou hast striven against the LORD. . . . Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The children of Israel and the children of Judah *were* oppressed together: and all that took them captives held them fast; they refused to let them go. Their Redeemer *is* strong; the LORD of hosts *is* his name: he shall throughly plead their cause, that he may give rest to the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon. . . . Babylon *hath been* a golden cup in the LORD'S hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad. Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed: howl for her; take balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed. We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: forsake her, and let us go every one into his own country: for her judgement reacheth unto heaven, and is lifted up *even* to the skies. The LORD hath brought forth our righteousness: come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God. Make bright the arrows; gather the shields: the LORD hath raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes: for his device *is* against Babylon, to destroy it; because it *is* the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance of his temple. Set up the standard upon the walls of Babylon, make the watch strong, set up the watchmen, prepare the ambushes: for the LORD hath both devised and done that which he spake against the inhabitants of Babylon. O thou that dwellest upon many waters, abundant in treasures, thine end is come, *and* the measure of thy covetousness. . . . The portion of Jacob *is* not like them; for he *is* the former of all things: and *Israel is* the rod of his inheritance: the LORD of hosts *is* his name. Thou *art* my battle axe *and* weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms; and with thee will I break in pieces the horse and his rider; and with thee will I break in pieces the chariot and his rider; with thee also will I break in pieces man and woman; and with thee will I break in pieces old and young; and with thee will I break in pieces the young man and the maid; I will also break in pieces with thee the

shepherd and his flock; and with thee will I break in pieces the husbandman and his yoke of oxen; and with thee will I break in pieces captains and rulers. And I will render unto Babylon and to all the inhabitants of Chaldea all their evil that they have done in Zion in your sight, saith the LORD. Behold, I *am* against thee, O destroying mountain, saith the LORD, which destroyest all the earth: and I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a burnt mountain. . . . One post shall run to meet another, and one messenger to meet another, to shew the king of Babylon that his city is taken at *one* end, and that the passages are stopped, and the reeds they have burned with fire, and the men of war are affrighted. For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; The daughter of Babylon *is* like a threshingfloor, *it is* time to thresh her: yet a little while, and the time of her harvest shall come. . . . And Babylon shall become heaps, a dwellingplace for dragons, an astonishment, and an hissing, without an inhabitant. They shall roar together like lions: they shall yell as lions' whelps. In their heat I will make their feasts, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the LORD. I will bring them down like lambs to the slaughter, like rams with he goats. How is Sheshach taken! and how is the praise of the whole earth surprised! how is Babylon become an astonishment among the nations! The sea is come up upon Babylon: she is covered with the multitude of the waves thereof. Her cities are a desolation, a dry land, and a wilderness, a land wherein no man dwelleth, neither doth *any* son of man pass thereby. And I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he hath swallowed up: and the nations shall not flow together any more unto him: yea, the wall of Babylon shall fall. My people, go ye out of the midst of her, and deliver ye every man his soul from the fierce anger of the LORD. . . . As Babylon *hath caused* the slain of Israel to fall, so at Babylon shall fall the slain of all the earth. Ye that have escaped the sword, go away, stand not still: remember the LORD afar off, and let Jerusalem come into your mind. . . . And I will make drunk her princes, and her wise *men*, her captains, and her rulers, and her mighty men: and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the King, whose name *is* the LORD of hosts. . . . And it shall be, when thou hast made an end of reading this book, *that* thou shalt bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of Euphrates:

The Fall of the Golden Cup

And thou shalt say, Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her: and they shall be weary. Thus far *are* the words of Jeremiah.—JER. L. 1–12, 22–24, 33, 34; LI. 7–13, 19–25, 31–33, 37–45, 49, 50, 57, 63, 64.

CHAPTER L. begins abruptly, as though the Prophet could not contain himself for joy, with the news of Babylon's fall. Description and comment are postponed, lest anything should confuse the exultant cry—*Babylon is taken!* Her gods fall with her, and her "idol-blocks" are broken down, being no better than scarecrows. From his first call, Jeremiah had been haunted by the North and its seething cauldron—abode of Scythian and Chaldean; in turn, there is a North for Babylon: *an assembly of great nations from the north* shall lay siege and capture her: *behold, she shall be the hindermost of the nations, a wilderness, a dry land, and a desert.* Once the instrument of God's judgement upon other nations, now because of her wanton pride she herself is judged—*for it is the vengeance of the Lord.* The "hammer of the whole earth," once out of God's hand, is broken in pieces. All through the proud city there is revelry and riot of the invader's sword, because of all her idolatries; *for it is a land of graven images, and they are mad upon idols.* Overthrown like Sodom and Gomorrah, Babylon like them shall remain through the long centuries uninhabited except by the wolf and the ostrich: *so shall no man dwell there, neither shall any son of man sojourn therein.* To this day its ruins are "avoided by the Bedawin, who believe that they are the haunt not of wild animals alone but of uncanny creatures."

Jer. l. 1–12, 22–24, 33, 34.

Chap. L. "Babylon is taken."

x. 5.

v. 3.

vv. 11, 19.

The Useless Hammer.

v. 23.

vv. 35–38.

Jer. l. 1–12, 22–24, 33, 34. vi. 22–24.

With poetic effectiveness the Prophet applies to *their* conquerors the powerful description of *themselves*, in his earlier ministry, when they were the destined conquerors of Jerusalem. *Then* it was their voice that roared like the sea against Zion; now it is a great nation from the North that shall roar like the sea against Babylon. Those who provide frightfulness in turn become the victims of frightfulness.

Chap. LI. Pride and Downfall.

The same colouring is used in the panels of chap. li.; and there is repeated emphasis on the hammer used and then broken and thrown away (vv. 20–24). Varying the metaphor, *Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord's hand;* but He will let it fall from His hand (v. 7). The gloom of the picture is for a moment relieved by a fine human touch—*We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed* (in accord with the exhortation of xxix. 7). Nay, instead of healing, *her judgement reacheth unto heaven.* The "destroying mountain" shall become a "burnt mountain." Babylon, proud of dwelling "upon many waters," shall be destroyed through those very waters; when the foe would stealthily enter by the river-beds from which the water had been diverted. The city was taken by surprise, during a night of revelry at court. *When they are heated*—with wine and lawless passion—*I will make their feast, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice* ["be stupefied," *Sept.*], *and sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the Lord.* Feast to punish feast—the feast of death to interrupt and drown the feast of vice. It will come with para-

v. 25. v. 13. v. 39. The long, long Sleep.

lysing suddenness and utter confusion: *One post shall run to meet another, and one messenger to meet another, to show the king of Babylon that his city is taken on every quarter: and the passages are surprised, and the reeds they have burned with fire, and the men of war are affrighted.* "O thou that dwellest upon many waters!"—the source of proud security is turned into its ruin. After her long revelry—long, far longer sleep. "Sometimes Sleep hath so heavy a sense," says Dr. John Donne in his *Devotions*, quoting verse 57—"as to be taken for sin itself, as well as for the punishment of sin, Death. Much comfort is not in much sleep, when the most fearful and most irrevocable malediction is presented by Thee, in a 'perpetual sleep.'"

Jer. li. 7–13, 19–25, 31–33, 37–45, 49, 50, 57, 63, 64. vv. 31, 32.

Israel's Redemption.

And in this fresh cataclysm, what is to become of the Hebrew captives in the midst of Babylon? Has God utterly rejected them? Will He let them perish in the wreckage of the proud empire of Nebuchadrezzar? Not so, for *their Redeemer is strong: the Lord of hosts is His name; He shall throughly plead their cause, that He may give rest to the earth, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon.* "Their Redeemer"—their near Kinsman (cp. xxxii. 6–9), their Advocate to plead in their behalf—is strong enough to deliver them from the fiery furnace, and bring them safely home. *My people, go ye out of the midst of her, and save yourselves every man from the fierce anger of the Lord.* It was not that God had suddenly changed—"the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning": it was Judah

Lam. v. 22.

l. 34.

li. 45.

iv. 1.

Jer. li. 7–13, 19–25, 31–33, 37–45, 49, 50, 57, 63, 64.

that had turned, and returned to Him. Their repentance is beautifully described, stage after stage (l. 4, 5). First of all Judah and Israel are re-united, and become a compact God-fearing people. Their changed spirit expresses itself in (1) tears of penitence, (2) seeking the Lord, (3) their faces Zionward, (4) a desire to cling to Him in an everlasting covenant. *They shall go on their way, weeping:* hitherto they had been sitting down by the rivers of Babylon (Ps. cxxxvii. 1), like the Prodigal in the far country. He had regretted and wept much before he said, "I will arise," and arose; so had they, but now they "go on their way," seeking the Lord their God, so long of them unsought. They are earnest inquirers, and their faces second their inquiries—*hitherward* (so the Hebrew), as though the Prophet himself stood on Zion's height, watching for their home-coming.

xxxi. 31–34. They are marching in the gladness and grace of the New Covenant—a covenant that "shall not be forgotten."

Their Redeemer is strong. v. 20.

But can they break the chain of their past? Can they escape from the bondage of old, vain regrets? *In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I leave as a remnant.* What a radiant, evangelical conception of God's forgiveness! As though He saw the auditors seeking, searching, and again seeking, searching, and were obliged to declare—None! It is a forecast of eternal salvation. Not only can

no earthly eyes find any sin, but heavenly eyes will find none, in all the redeemed hosts. There may be tears in Heaven, but sin—none! He that loveth us shall have "loosed us from our sins by His blood." *Their Redeemer is strong.* Jer. li. 7–13, 19–25, 31–33, 37–45, 49, 50, 57, 63, 64. Rev. vii. 17. Rev. i. 5.

All that took them captives hold them fast; they refuse to let them go. But what are they all against the strength of an Almighty Redeemer? And all the powers that hold men captive everywhere cannot prevail against the grace of God. "If God is for us, who is against us?" Nothing counts when God is on our side. "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Rom. viii. 31, 37). The glorious purpose of God cannot be thwarted: *who is the shepherd that will stand before Me?* what king, what power of darkness? *Their Redeemer is strong.* v. 33. li. 44.

The Lord hath brought forth our righteousness. God not only delivers, but vindicates—vindicates His own character, and the rights of His children. As the Branch is called "The Lord our Righteousness" (xxiii. 6), so will the redeemed shine in their Heavenly Father's realm in the "beauty and glorious dress" of His righteousness. God will keep His word: He is not like the idol-blocks of Babylon—*vanity, a work of delusion, they; but the Portion of Jacob is not like these.* Therefore make your escape from Babylon: *go ye, stand not still; remember the Lord from afar, and let Jerusalem come into your mind.* Pure memories are always of much religious value. As to the exiles in Babylon, so to those who have left their motherland for far-off li. 10. "Thus shall the Righteous shine." vv. 17, 18. v. 50.

Jer. li. 7–13, 19–25, 31–33, 37–45, 49, 50, 57, 63, 64.

countries to-day, the message holds good—"Remember the Lord from afar!" Where there is neither sanctuary nor preacher, let memory build its own unseen temple, and faith minister as though the whole general assembly and church of the first-born were all present: let Jerusalem come into their mind! Then they, too, shall find that *their Redeemer is strong.*

An Application

1. 38. *They are mad upon idols.* In these words is given the burden of the Prophet's life-long ministry, the sum of his warnings, as God's crusader valiant for the truth, whether directed to Jerusalem or Babylon. All idolatry is moral insanity. When we note that the Hebrew word for "Idols" means "Terrors"—the hideous and often obscene figures worshipped then, and worshipped still—the madness is all the sadder. If men will not worship God in the beauty of His holiness, they end in worshipping images in the ugliness of vice. There is a legitimate and innocent pursuit of pleasure, a diligent but still not selfish pursuit of wealth, an eager but yet devout pursuit of science, a generous and reverent pursuit of culture. On the other hand, each of these pursuits may but too easily degenerate into idolatry; and once a man yields to the temptation, he grows mad upon his idol.

A Supplication

1. 6. O Thou good and great Shepherd, have pity upon the multitudes which wander to-day from

mountain to hill, having forgotten their resting-place. They follow primrose paths, and find themselves among thorns and briers, entangled and bruised and worn out; and yet they return not to Thy green pastures and still waters. They are weary, but they are proud and ashamed, and the ways of Zion are not in their heart. Quicken them into a heavenly seeking, and lead them back to the old paths which bring them to the one resting-place in Thyself. Amen.

Jer. li. 7–13, 19–25, 31–33, 37–45, 49, 50, 57, 63, 64.

XXXII

"ALL YE THAT PASS BY"

How doth the city sit solitary, *that was* full of people! *how* is she become as a widow! she *that was* great among the nations, *and* princess among the provinces, *how* is she become tributary! She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears *are* on her cheeks: among all her lovers she hath none to comfort *her:* all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies. Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude: she dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest: all her persecutors overtook her between the straits. . . . All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul: see, O LORD, and consider; for I am become vile. *Is it* nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted *me* in the day of his fierce anger. . . . For these *things* I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me: my children are desolate, because the enemy prevailed. . . . I called for my lovers, *but* they deceived me: my priests and mine elders gave up the ghost in the city, while they sought their meat to relieve their souls. Behold, O LORD; for I *am* in distress: my bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned within me; for I have grievously rebelled: abroad the sword bereaveth, at home *there is* as death. They have heard that I sigh: *there is* none to comfort me: all mine enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that thou hast done *it:* thou wilt bring the day *that* thou hast called, and they shall be like unto me. Let all their wickedness come before thee; and do unto them as thou hast done unto me for all my transgressions: for my sighs *are* many, and my heart *is*

faint. . . . How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, *and* cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger! . . . All that pass by clap *their* hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, *saying*, *Is* this the city that *men* call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth? . . . How is the gold become dim! *how* is the most fine gold changed! the stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street. The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter! . . . Remember, O LORD, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach. Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens. . . . The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning. The crown is fallen *from* our head: woe unto us, that we have sinned! For this our heart is faint; for these *things* our eyes are dim. Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it. Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation. Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, *and* forsake us so long time? Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old. But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us.—LAM. I. 1–3, 11, 12, 16, 19–22; II. 1, 15; IV. 1, 2; V. 1, 2, 15–22.

No lover of poetry, of its content or its diction, or both, can fail to be moved by this book. Dante might have been helped to form his style—keen, vivid, and yet solemnly austere—by the study of it. In his *Vita Nuova* he describes the desolation that came upon him after the death of Beatrice. At the time Florence was rejoicing and feasting over a great victory in war; but to him, weeping alone in his chamber, the city was desolate; and he quotes verse 1,

Lam. i. 1–3, 11, 12, 16, 19–22.

Sola Civitas.

How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people!
How is she become as a widow!

Lam. i. 1–3, 11, 12, 16, 19–22.

To him, with Beatrice dead, no one was left in Florence.

The first four chapters are not only metrical, but acrostic: *i.e.* each line of the first verse begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each verse in turn takes up the successive letter, till the twenty-two are complete.

What Jeremiah during his prophetic ministry up to the time of the capture and destruction of the city pictured as a vision of the future is here pictured as fact. It has all happened. Phrase after phrase from the Prophet's lips finds here an echo, mournful and thrilling: "it shall be done"—"done!"

Taking together Chaps. I.–II. and IV.–V., we are brought close to—

I. The Misery of the Conquered

Jerusalem, solitary and defenceless as a widow, is reduced to abject slavery. There is hunger in every home: *all her people sigh, they seek for bread; they have given their pleasant things for meat to refresh the soul* (i. 11). The children ask, Where is corn and wine? and, as they ask, swoon in their mother's bosom (ii. 12; iv. 4). More horrible still, the very mothers in the madness of hunger, like Ugolino in the tower of Pisa (Dante: *Inferno*, xxxiii.), *eat the children that are dandled in their hands* (ii. 20; iv. 10).

> They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger;
> For these pine away, stricken through, for want of the fruits of the field (iv. 9; i. 6; v. 9, 10).

II. The Cruel Arrogance of the Victors

Their pursuers, *swifter than the eagles of the heaven*, had chased them upon the mountains, laid wait for them in the wilderness, overtaken them *between the straits*—in a narrow place from which there was no escape (iv. 18–20; i. 3). The enemy not only *spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things*, the most valued possessions of the home, but entered and defiled her sanctuary (i. 10; ii. 6, 7; iv. 1), and even fell to mocking at her sabbaths (i. 7)—a pastime much favoured to-day, among many classes and nations. Instead of pitying her, they insulted her and boasted of their valorous inhumanity: Lam. i. 1–3, 11, 12, 16, 19–22.

All that pass by clap their hands at thee;
They hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying:
Is this the city that men called The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth? (ii. 15, 16; i. 7, 21, 22; iv. 21, 22).

However heavy God's just judgements may be, He does not intend them to be food for inhuman enjoyment to the onlookers (Jer. xxx. 14–16; xlviii. 27; Zeph. ii. 8).

All mine enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that Thou hast done it (i. 21).

What made the vindictive orgy still more cruel was that Jerusalem's former allies joined in it. To begin with, they had played her false—*I called for my lovers, but they deceived me* (i. 19, and vv. 2, 8; iv. 17). They passed by, giving no heed, taking no pity upon her.

Lam. i. 1–3, 11, 12, 16, 19–22.

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by ?
Behold and see if there be any sorrow, like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me,
Wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger (i. 12, 17).

It is the cry of Job to his friends—" Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O my friends ; for the hand of God hath touched me " (xix. 21).

III. A Deep Sense of the Anger of God

There is in men an anger of bad temper ; there is also an anger of holy love. The former works violently for destruction ; the latter patiently for purification. The fire of the Divine anger burns for cleansing — burns intensely, and therefore destructively of all that is hostile to it and hurtful to the soul. This is the jealousy of God, frequently mentioned in the Old Testament. " An intense affection," says Dr. John Pulsford, " is very jealous. The God of summer glory, the God of heaven's glory, and the God of all hearts *cannot* be a lukewarm God. Who could wish Him to be lukewarm, either in His love to us, or about the return of our love to Him ? ' I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God.' "

Throughout these lamentations there is a haunting sense of God's anger against Jerusalem. It is the " *day* of His fierce anger " (i. 12–14) :

From on high hath He sent fire into my bones, and it prevaileth against them.

This is penal fire, not the prophetic fire which Jeremiah speaks of as forcing him to speak (xx. 9).

She is in God's net, faint with ineffectually struggling to escape. True, it is her own sin that He uses to chastise her: Lam. i. 1–3, 11, 12, 16, 19–22. ii. 1, 15.

> The yoke of my transgressions is bound by His hand,
> They are knit together, they are come up upon my neck;
> He hath made my strength to fail:
> The Lord hath delivered me into their hands, against whom
> I am not able to stand.

It is a graphic picture as though God were twisting and twining her transgressions like cords to bind fast the yoke of bondage.

Chapter ii. is filled with this unlifting gloom—the cloud of the Lord's anger covering the daughter of Zion (v. 1). Line after line begins with "The Lord hath" or "He hath," till it resounds like tremendous hammer-strokes:

> The Lord hath swallowed up . . .
> The Lord is become as an enemy . . .
> The Lord hath cast off His altar . . .
> The Lord hath proposed to destroy . . .
> The Lord hath done that which He devised . . .

In vv. 2 and 3 alone, we have in six successive lines—

> He hath thrown down . . .
> He hath brought them down . . .
> He hath profaned . . .
> He hath cut off . . .
> He hath drawn back His right hand . . .
> And He hath burned up . . .

The human instruments are all ignored; God, in fierce anger, does it all, *and hath not pitied* (v. 2). In withdrawing *His right hand from before the enemy*,

Lam. ii. 1, 15; iv. 1, 2; v. 1, 2, 15–22.

Jerusalem is left defenceless, like a soldier without a shield. He seemed even to be fighting Himself in the enemy's ranks—

> He hath bent His bow like an enemy, He hath stood with His right hand as an adversary.

Even more terrible still, *He hath violently taken away His tabernacle, He hath cast off His altar, He hath abhorred His sanctuary.* The responsibility of the unrestrained destruction and immeasurable desolation is laid wholly upon God, both in initiative and execution: *He hath purposed* (v. 8); *He hath caused the enemy to rejoice over thee* (v. 17); *He hath burned up Jacob like a flaming fire* (v. 3); *He hath kindled a fire in Zion* (iv. 11). And yet faith in God survives, and cries out on the dreary morrow of doomsday—

> Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us:
> Behold, and see our reproach (v. 1).

For God to "remember" and "see" would be enough: "for His mercy endureth for ever"; and in comparison with that, "His anger endureth but a moment . . . weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

Ps. xxx. 5.

V. Penitential Tears

They flow fast and warm;—if only they had come earlier to bedew and cleanse the nation's soul, before her harvest had passed, her summer had ended! There is no attempt to palliate her sin, to minimise the *multitude of her transgressions* (i. 5) or their determined shamelessness:

Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is become as an unclean thing. Lam. ii. 1, 15; iv. 1, 2; v. 1, 2, 15–22.

She had hardened herself in her moral revolt; *she remembered not her latter end* (i. 8, 9). So convinced is she now of the enormity of her sins, which brought her doom upon her, that she can say in her saddest hour, *The Lord is righteous* (i. 18); and when she is stung by the insults of her adversaries, and calls upon God to judge them also, she still ranks herself with them:

Let all their wickedness come up before Thee;
And do unto them as Thou hast done unto me for all my transgressions (i. 22).

If now as captives they lack both courage and true vision, it is the result of sin:

Woe unto us! for we have sinned.
For this our heart is faint,
For those things our eyes are dim (vv. 16, 17).

In blaming herself she does not excuse the prophets who had misguided her, by their visions of vanity and "whitewash" (ii. 14). Had they discovered and denounced her iniquity, they might have saved her; but their luscious messages had become "causes of banishment" (*see also* iv. 13).

VI. Prayer—Personal and Intercessory

All is in the key of prayer. Remorse and confession of sin, thoughts of the desolation and mockery, the absence of the means of grace, dread of the Divine wrath—they are all a monologue of the stricken soul, with God as unseen Listener.

Lam. ii. 1, 15 ; iv. 1, 2 ; v. 1, 2, 15–22.

The cry is repeated, *Consider, and see* (i. 9, 11, 20 ; ii. 20 ; v. 1). Her prayer for help is grounded (1) on her affliction as it was aggravated by the haughtiness of the enemy, i. 9 ; (2) on her own loss of self-respect—*I am become vile*, i. 11 ; *from the daughter of Zion all her majesty is departed ;* (3) on her penitent self-humiliation, i. 20. Chap. ii. 18, 19, is a moving call to earnest, unceasing prayer, day and night : *give thyself no respite* (cp. Luke xviii. 1), sacrificing even the hours of sleep to intercession, *in the night, at the beginning of* [each of] *the watches ;* and the whole soul was to be strenuously engaged : *pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord.* No sin was to be excused or unconfessed : let God see all ! And in chap. v. God is called to consider each sordid detail of their misery, each bleeding wound of their pitiless suffering. They had to pay siege prices for water and wood ; each scanty portion of bread was obtained at the peril of life ; famished children stumbled under a load of firewood. The *burning heat of famine* had made the skin *black like an oven.* Wives and maids were at the mercy of the drunken lust of the invaders ; *princes were hanged up by their hand*, to torture out of them some secret of wealth or of State ; the grey hairs of old men did not protect them from shameless insult. It is a " city of dreadful night " : ghostly and ghastly.

> The joy of our heart is ceased ;
> Our dance is turned into mourning.

Where is God's mercy ?

Wherefore dost Thou forget us for ever
And forsake us so long time ?

Lam. ii. 1, 15; iv. 1, 2; v. 1, 2, 15–22.

God might have replied—"Wherefore didst thou forget and forsake Me so long time?" But let Him remember that we are dust! The life of man is so brief, the life of a nation so short, while He can press a thousand years into one of His days.

Thou, O Lord, abidest for ever;
Thy throne is from generation to generation.

Has Jerusalem then sincerely and thoroughly repented? Nay, that is the deeper depth of her misery—she had even lost the power to repent, without the help of Divine mercy.

Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned;
Renew our days as of old:
Unless Thou hast utterly rejected us,
And art very wroth against us! (R.V. margin).

The possible translation of the concluding verse, given in the margin of the Revised Version, is more in harmony with the preceding verses than the Text translation, with its note of unredeemed despair. The everlastingness of God provides vaster range for His pardoning mercy: and as He is ever-vigilant to discover the first faint sign of revival, a sigh of homewardness will surely bring God effectually to help.

An Application

Many of the phrases employed to picture the sorrows of Jerusalem in her desolation, lend themselves to set forth the experiences of the Church in

Lam. ii. 1, 15 ; iv. 1, 2 ; v. 1, 2, 15–22.

periods of depression and defeat. There are times when the enemy riots in her failures, and makes mock of her griefs. Her priests have no power, and her preachers falter in their message. Her Sabbaths are dishonoured, the neglected ways of Zion mourn. The gold of her doctrine has become dim, the precious stones of her faith are esteemed as earthen pitchers. She stretches forth her hands, there is none to comfort her—even among those to whom she had herself brought great comfort. Then it is time for the Church to remember her faults and confess her transgressions. Then it is time for her to mourn in secret, and pray without ceasing, keeping vigil with her vigilant Lord.

iv. 2.

A Supplication

O Thou God of pity and long-suffering, visit Thy people everywhere in their marred Jerusalems. Give them a new soul to build a nobler temple, strengthen their hands to build a better, stronger city of God on earth. When we grow weary and stumble, refresh us with a glimpse of the New Jerusalem, built not with hands, and therefore eternal in the heavens.

If thou canst get but thither,
There grows the flower of peace,
The Rose that cannot wither,
Thy Fortress, and thy Ease.

XXXIII

NEW MORNINGS BRING NEW MERCIES

I *am* the man *that* hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He hath led me, and brought *me into* darkness, but not *into* light. . . . Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer. He hath inclosed my ways with hewn stone, he hath made my paths crooked. . . . And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgat prosperity. And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD: remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath *them* still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. *It is of* the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. *They are* new every morning: great *is* thy faithfulness. The LORD *is* my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD *is* good unto them that wait for him, to the soul *that* seeketh him. *It is* good that *a man* should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD. *It is* good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne *it* upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope. He giveth *his* cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach. For the Lord will not cast off for ever: but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men. . . . Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD. Let us lift up our heart with *our* hands unto God in the heavens. . . . Mine eye runneth down with rivers of

water for the destruction of the daughter of my people. Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission, till the LORD look down, and behold from heaven.—LAM. III. 1, 2, 8, 9, 17-33, 39-41, 48-50.

Lam. iii. 1, 2, 8, 9, 17–33, 39–41, 48–50.

CHAPTER III. reflects all the poignant sorrow of the other four chapters; but it is lit with sudden gleams of hope, and unexpected strains of doxologies. It is an acrostic, in verses of three long lines; and the change of key in vv. 20, 21 is like the end of the prelude in Haydn's *Creation*.

God and the Man. vv. 1–16.

In expression it is more personal than the rest of the book—"*I am the man* that hath seen affliction": but it is probably meant to be the representative voice of the nation in prayer—confessing, protesting, interceding, confiding. It begins under a sense of the anger of God—*the rod of His wrath;* and the emphasis throughout is on God Himself, as though He used no agent in working out His dread judgments. *He hath led me and caused me to walk in darkness—He hath builded against me—He hath fenced up my ways with hewn stone—He hath bent His bow and set me as a mark for the arrow*—and so recurringly up to verse 16. God everywhere, day and night, in all the afflictions poured upon him: God Himself, with every secondary cause ignored, deleted. It is a brave facing of bare truth, as he conceived it. Darkness, as of the abode of the dead; physical pain that makes food taste gall, and break his teeth as with gravel stones; his way blocked high with hewn stones so that he has to divert his course and so loses his way;—all this God Himself deals out to him; God the archer

aiming His unerring shafts at him; God as a bear, as a lion, lying in wait (cp. Jer. xxv. 38). Worse still, he felt that all his prayers were discarded—the last mercy of heaven withdrawn! *He shutteth out my prayer,* as an outcast thing. As a child tired out with his own crying, he ends with a sob—*I said, My strength is perished, and mine expectation from the Lord.* God—nothing any more to expect from Him!—what deeper depth can there be, until we hear the cry in the benighted noon of Calvary?

Lam. iii. 1, 2, 8, 9, 17–33, 39–41, 48–50. Matt. xxvii. 46.

Many have travelled along this road, some to the bitter end; others have halted in time. The halt comes when we turn from the affliction and the outcast state (v. 19, R.V. margin), from the wormwood and the gall, and begin to "count the blessings," and "name them one by one,"—

"And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done."

So the surprise came to the man who had "seen affliction by the rod of His wrath." Memory loves to dwell on the clouded days of life's past, forgetting how much more in number the bright days have been; it recalls each solitary cup of wormwood, omitting the cups of blessing running over (Ps. xxiii. 5). Let memory attend the school of piety, and then—*This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope:* hope, the first to return to the soul that feared there was nothing more to expect from God! "This"—no longer the affliction, but the compassions of God which never fail: they are no deceitful brooks (Job vi. 15–20; Jer. xv. 18), but "streams of mercy never ceasing." They are like the fountain

vv. 21–24. The Aid of Memory. Jer. xviii. 14.

Lam. iii. 1, 2, 8, 9, 17–33, 39–41, 48–50.

in the rock of the field, secretly and continuously fed as from the eternal snow of high mountains. *They are new every morning.* Every day has its new sunrise, every evening its new sunset; every spring its new primroses and violets; every cloud its new rainbow. Such newness is a constant witness to the living God, a God who eternally thinks in merciful thoughts, in fresh benedictions.

1 Pet. iv. 19.

He is a "faithful Creator"; since the beginning of time there has never yet been a night, however wild and dark, without a dawn; never a winter, however dreary and long, without a spring—O we of little faith! His mercies are many and great and unfailing: yet He Himself is more than all His

1 Pet. i. 4.

mercies, richer than all His gifts: *The Lord is my portion, saith my soul*—"an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

If God gives a new sunrise every day, He would also give new forgiveness, new comfort, new strength; if only we make Him—the Lord Himself—our portion. We can use His gifts often without possessing hope; but we cannot use Him without coming into the inheritance and estate of an eternal hope.

Good Hope. vv. 25–30.

What shall the afflicted now say? what have they learnt in counting the blessings? *It is good that a man should hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.* So he has recovered expectations from the Lord; and the greatest expectation of all—salvation: from Him, and no one else; from Him, Who desires to give that more than anything else. "For the Son of Man came to

save": it would not have been worth while His coming for anything less than that. So great a gift cannot be sought too early in life: *it is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth*, and be found in old age, it may be, like Simeon, looking for the one Consolation (Luke ii. 25).

Lam. iii. 1, 2, 8, 9, 17–33, 39–41, 48–50.

In the first part of the chapter the sense of God's devastating wrath seemed to obliterate in the writer's mind the sense of sin deserving to be so punished. Not once does he even hint that he—or the nation—merited it. A vision of grace helps to unveil to us our sin; we become conscious of our foulness, when we view the crystal fountain; of our nakedness when we behold the white robe of righteousness. So now let the afflicted meekly bear his punishment: *let him sit alone and keep silence, because He hath laid it upon him*—He, the Author of salvation, who can use afflictions to make His salvation perfect in each of the saved. *Let him give his cheek to him that smiteth him;* for God can use the enemy's blow to educate His child in patience (cp. 2 Sam. xvi. 10–12).

Sin seen in the Light of Mercy.

He encourages himself to endure as a far-shining ray of revealed truth lights up for him part of the mystery of suffering—God does not afflict "willingly," from His heart: the chastisement is not vindictive, but curative. It will not last beyond the measured needs of discipline (Jer. xxx. 11; cp. Isa. xxvii. 8). Any man using his power wickedly, to crush the captive, *to turn aside the right of a man before the face of the Most High*—will have God against him (cp. James v. 4).

Lam. iii. 1, 2, 8, 9, -173, 39–41, 48–50.

The thought is progressive. As God overrules all things, evil is not something outside His government. His wisdom and His power leave no unoccupied territories throughout His vast creation. Let not man, therefore, in his sins, complain for the punishment he justly suffers: rather let him give himself to the close searching of his own heart with a view to turning Godwards; let his searching lead him to devout prayer, with sincere confession: *let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.*

Return of Clouds. vv. 37–66.

Having reached this lofty height, there is apparent descent. There is a change at verse 40 from "I" unto "we": and he is once more borne down by the burden of the national misery, and their impotence: *Thou hast covered Thyself with a cloud, that our prayers should not pass through.* But it is not the unrelieved gloom of the first part of the chapter. Tears flow without ceasing, but their flow shall cease, when the Lord looks down from heaven (v. 50). He summons experience to his aid—"this I recall." He himself had been shut up in a dungeon, cut off from living hope; he had cried to the Lord, he had been heard; God had drawn near to him and banished his fears. God had become His advocate, pleading the causes of his soul, and secured a verdict of release. God has also his adversaries in hand, to deal with them according to their guilt; rewarding their impenitence with hardness of heart (cp. Matt. xiii. 14, 15). If his prayers against his enemies miss the mark, God is just, and will make no unjust use of

Lam. iii.

our feeble cries. His wisdom corrects our mistakes ; 1, 2, 8,
His long-suffering keeps safe what our impatience 9, 17–33,
would mar. 39–41,

As we reach the conclusion of these meditations, 48–50.
while we thank God for brave teachers in dark days, we feel afresh that for our final succour there is—"Jesus only." Serene and solitary, He remains the one Teacher for all ages : patient and gracious, He is also our very Brother.

An Application

Great is Thy faithfulness. In the deep darkness iii. 23.
and storm-swept desolation, this thought shines as a bright star with serene and healing rays. Nature's trustworthiness is founded on this ; the life of man is saved from utter disorder through this ; the hope of eternal salvation rests on this :— God is faithful, He is to be trusted, He cannot go back on His word. Christ has given proof that in Him all the promises of God are yea and amen. Man was made by a faithful Creator, man is saved by a faithful Saviour, man renders his last account to a faithful Judge. This eternal faithfulness knits together all the ends of creation.

A Supplication

O Thou faithful Leader of souls, we bless Thee for Thy servants whom Thou hast safely brought home. In the darkness of strife, in the strain and distress of the conflict, in the hour of failure, in the

Lam. iii. 1, 2, 8, 9, 17–33, 39–41, 48–50.

loneliness of death, Thou wert with them; and it was enough. May we too be guided and upheld, kept true in faith and unfailing in love. May we so live in Thy truth and for Thy truth, that the truth shall make us for ever free. Lord, have mercy upon us. Lord, defend us from all foes without and within. Lord, grant us to be numbered with Thy prophets and apostles and all Thy saints in glory everlasting, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Printed in Great Britain
BY
WILLIAM CLOWES & SONS, LIMITED,
LONDON AND BECCLES.

BS1525 .L67
The book of the prophet Jeremiah.
Princeton Theological Seminary–Speer Library
1 1012 00068 6461